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OR,
**MADCAP MADGE,
THE SIREN OF THE SEA.**

A Companion Tale to "The Sea
Fugitive."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
A GIRL'S THREAT.

"CAPTAIN MAYNARD, it rests with you, sir, to save your vessel and the lives of your crew." The words broke from the lips of a young girl, and as she spoke she stepped back from the wheel of a schooner-of-war, and stood with arms folded, eyes flashing, her long hair tossing in the wind, and a look upon her face that was both reckless and defiant.

It was a thrilling scene, for the sea was a caldron of seething foam, the night was black in its darkness, and yet illumined by a weird light that arose from the waters, while ever and anon a blaze of lightning swept over all, reveal-

"MY GOD! IT IS POOR JOB JENNINGS," CRIED MADCAP MADGE, AS SHE GAZED ON THE SCENE FROM THE SCHOONER'S DECK.

ing ugly rocks, an iron-bound coast and a storm of terrific fury raging on sea and land.

In the midst of it struggled the schooner-of-war, her topmasts housed, her guns lashed, her crew at their posts, and under close-reefed mainsail and jib she was pitching, swaying, staggering along.

At the wheel stood two stout seamen, whose strength aided the skill of the young girl, who was acting pilot of the craft in that wild night of storm, the one frail being to guide it to safety or to death.

She was beautiful, a beauty that was almost weird-like, and tinged with recklessness of expression, more becoming a man's face than a young girl's.

Near her stood the man she addressed, Lieutenant Mayo Maynard, the schooner's commander, and behind him were several young officers.

It was a moment of horror, for suddenly, in the schooner's direst need, the young girl had stepped back from the wheel, and uttering the words that open this story, stood awaiting their effect upon the officer.

"Great God! what can you mean?" cried the young lieutenant in answer to her words.

"I mean, sir," and the words came sharp and distinct, "that this vessel is in the most dreaded place on this coast, in the very center of the Devil's Caldron, and straight to destruction, with all on board, I let her drive, if you do not save her and the lives of those in your hands!"

"But Heaven knows I can do nothing, for I am powerless here, you alone knowing these waters."

"You have a prisoner in the cabin?"

"I have."

"He is charged with a crime which he says he is innocent of, and you came here to capture him, and have done so."

"To take him to Boston means his death at the yard-arm, to let him go free gives him a chance to prove his innocence."

"Release him! pledge me your word you will allow him to go free, to leave this vessel with me, and I will save your schooner."

"But I cannot do this!"

"Then I touch not the wheel again, and you will see that I go to my death as fearlessly as you do, sir," and the girl looked like a statue, her lips wearing a grim, reckless smile, as she stood where the light from the cabin companion-way fell full upon her.

Mayo Maynard glanced fixedly into her face, and he read there reckless resolve.

Then he looked at his beautiful vessel, the three-score brave men at the mercy of his word and then upon the raging sea about them.

Had he a right to risk all for one life?

No! and so he cried:

"I give you the pledge you ask—Noel Brandon shall go free!"

"Save the vessel, and quick! for the love of God, for do you not see we are dashing to destruction?"

A cry broke from the girl's lips, she sprung to the wheel, and as ringing as a trumpet came her words:

"Hard! hard down your helm!"

The two men at the wheel obeyed, while Lieutenant Maynard also sprung to their aid.

The schooner seemed to crouch and stagger, as though she had been struck a mortal blow; but she obeyed her helm, wore round, and went bounding away from the threatened danger as though filled with human fright.

Away, over the seething waters, rushing like a mad horse, half drowned, staggering, the good vessel went, until suddenly a dark wall loomed up ahead.

As she drew nearer it was seen to be an island, and it broke the wild force of the storm and the waves from seaward, and proved to be a safe haven of refuge.

Into a cove, sheltered thoroughly, darted the schooner, and soon the anchor was let fall and the vessel rode at anchor in perfect safety.

The Girl Pilot had kept her word too and had saved the vessel, on the pledge of her commander to set his prisoner free.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOUNDED SAILOR.

In the cabin of the schooner-of-war Scorpion, just saved from destruction by the Girl Pilot of the Kennebec, for my story opens on the rocky coast of Maine, half-reclined a young man in the undress uniform of an officer in the navy.

There were indications on his shoulders that his designation of rank had been taken off, but he wore the look of a sailor, for his face was darkly bronzed, and his appearance indicated that he was not a landsman.

His face was handsome, though it bore the stamp of one who had been sowing a generous crop of wild oats in his years; still it was a face to admire, open, fearless, manly and yet now stamped with a look of sorrow and suffering, both mental and physical.

He was resting upon a divan, half-reclining, as I have said, one leg placed so as to keep it out straight, and evidently he was wounded in this limb, as it was bandaged.

A pair of crutches, made from oars, rested near him, a few books were on a table at hand,

but he was calmly gazing upon vacancy and lost in deep thought, when he is presented to the reader.

The staggering of the schooner through the storm seems to hold no terror for him, as his face did not change its expression in all the wild swaying and plunging of the craft.

Suddenly he feels the schooner's motion less violent, then she seems to be running on almost even keel, and soon after comes the splash of the anchor as it is let fall, and all is still.

"That wonderful girl has escaped every danger and run in to an anchorage."

"I half hoped that we would strike and go down, for better such a death than at the yard-arm," said the young sailor.

"I am getting heartily tired of all this, and I would have given up long ago but for the noble manner that girl and her allies have fought to save me."

"Well, the end is at hand now, and the struggle has all been for naught, unless to prove that there is true love and friendship in the world—Ah! some one comes, and I'll know where the schooner is at anchor."

As the officer spoke a footfall was heard on the steps of the companionway and one entered wearing the uniform of a senior lieutenant in the navy of the United States.

It was the same officer whom the Girl Pilot had forced to make a pledge upon the deck, half an hour before.

His face was a trifle stern, yet winning and full of character, and his form was upright and graceful.

"Well, Brandon, the schooner is safe at anchor under the lee of one of the outer islands, and after the most desperate run I ever saw," he said as he sat down near the wounded sailor.

"Yes, I knew by the howling of the storm, roaring of the waves and the behavior of the schooner that she was in desperate peril, and, but for you and your gallant crew losing your lives, I would have wished her to go down and thus end mine."

"Your life is safe, Brandon, at least for the present."

"I had no fear that it would be otherwise, with that strange girl at the wheel."

"I mean that you are to go free, Brandon."

"I cannot understand what you mean, Maynard."

"I will explain at once, by telling you that I am pledged to set you free."

"I yet grope in darkness as to your meaning."

"To be explicit, in the midst of our greatest danger, that wonderful little Siren of the Sea, for I can call her nothing else, sprung away from the wheel with the threat that the schooner and all on board, her sweet self included, should go down to Davy Jones, unless I pledged myself to set you free."

"Good God! did she do this?" cried the young sailor in utter amazement.

"She did, and you should be happy in possessing the love of such a woman, Noel Brandon."

"Her love? Why, Lieutenant Maynard, she does not love me, although I would give much did she do so, under different circumstances from those I am at present placed in, with the galls staring me in the face."

"The fact is, she is the daughter of a coast skipper, whom no one knows aught about, and who settled in the cottage where he now dwells, while my proud parents always looked down upon the Vernons, and when she saved my life, years ago, feared I might become interested in her, as I did."

"I returned the compliment by saving her from death on one occasion, and so canceled my debt to her, and thus the matter ended until I came home this time."

"As you know, Maynard, I was dismissed from the service on account of my fatal duel with the senior lieutenant of my ship, and although the affair was forced upon me by his petty persecutions, there was no palliation allowed me, and I suffered."

"I came home in disgrace, wondering whether my proud parents would receive me or not, and Madcap Madge, the Maid of the Kennebec, was the first one to greet me, as I sprung off the packet schooner at the village pier, for she ran up ahead of us in her life-skiff, and went up into the town to do some shopping."

"Nettled by my return in disgrace, I went to the inn, the Flag Ship, as old Buntline calls his place, and began to drink deeply, until the wagon came to drive me over home to Brandon Hall."

"Well, I started, with Silly Sam as my driver, and we were attacked on the highway; I was wounded in my left leg, and Silly Sam was stunned by a bullet glancing on his temple; but it would have been worse had not Madcap Madge suddenly come to the rescue, killed one of our three assailants, I shooting a second one, while the third escaped."

"They had come in a sloop-yacht to rob me, and Madcap Madge took the little craft as a prize."

"I went back to the village, putting up at the Flag Ship Inn, when suddenly I received word—how, it matters not—that Captain Marsden,

who had persecuted me aboard ship, and then had me dismissed, had been found murdered in his bed at his hotel, and had been robbed of a large sum."

"There were evidences of a struggle; my cloak, belt and a weapon were found in the room, and feeling hatred for my former captain, I was accused of the murder, and you were sent here to arrest me, that I might be taken back, and in the heat of bitterness against me, tried and hanged."

"I have been saved by Madcap Madge, and now you tell me she has once more rescued me?"

"Yes; and to-day she left the cruiser, when we went into the cove, for you to see your sister, and, as you know, was absent until just before the storm broke."

"Yes, I remember, and that you dreaded that she would not return to pilot you to sea, as she had promised."

"Well, it seems that she went to her home up the coast, and ordered her father's sloop, the Blue Bell, to come to this island and await our coming, and she has informed me that she will take you on the sloop with her, and leave one of the crew to pilot us out to sea to-morrow."

"She is a strange girl; but does she go in the sloop to-night?"

"Yes, and the craft lies not far away, so, when you are ready, I will have the men lower you into the sloop's boat."

"I am ready now; but I hate to take my liberty in this way, though I hope, by being free, to prove that I am not guilty."

"For your sake, Brandon, I am glad that you get free, though of course it is my duty to capture you again if you cross my path, so I advise you to find some hiding-place where you will be secure."

"As it is, I can do nothing more than release you, as I promised Madcap Madge I would do, so you are at liberty now, and I do hope some day you will prove your innocence, for I have always liked you, since we were middies together, and it pained me to see your sister suffer when she came on board to say good-by to you to-day."

"Farewell, Brandon, and Heaven have mercy upon you."

"Good-by, Maynard, and accept my thanks for your kind treatment of me."

Thus the two officers parted, for soon after Noel Brandon, the wounded officer, was transferred to the Blue Bell, the little sloop belonging to the father of Madcap Madge Vernon, the Girl Pilot of the Kennebec.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIREN'S STORY.

A COTTAGE home on the rugged coast of Maine, and standing in the entrance to a vale that looked out far and wide upon the sea, the river and hill-lands.

A neatly-built, well-furnished place, with flower-beds in front, a vegetable garden in the rear, a small barn in which were two rough-looking, hardy ponies, and overshadowing all, cliffs and heavy pine forests, with far below a small haven, a basin, in which were several boats visible.

An old negro driving up a cow from the lowlands, an old negress seated, pipe in mouth, upon the steps of the little porch of the cottage, engaged in knitting, and a man standing upon a cliff overhanging the small harbor and watching the approach of a skiff containing three persons.

This was the home of Madge, the Kennebec Pilot, and here she had dwelt from her earliest girlhood, coming, with her father and the two old negroes from the South, it was said, and settling there on the Maine coast to pass their days.

Skipper Vernon, the father of Madge, had had built a trim sloop and had turned coaster, running cargoes to Portland, Boston and other ports, and this was all that was known of him, though, as he appeared to possess ample means, strange rumors floated around that his vessel was more of a smuggler than a trader.

It was Skipper Vernon that stood upon the cliff, watching the approaching skiff.

He was a tall man, upright as an Indian, his face was darkly bronzed, his features clean cut, and he had the look of one who had been reared in a life of refinement.

He was attired in an undress naval uniform, with no insignia of rank, however, and his face was stern, and at times sorrowful.

"It is certainly Madge, and I recognize Melmer, my mate, and that queer fellow Silly Sam; but where is the Blue Bell?"

"Something has happened without doubt, but I am glad to see my child return."

"I will meet her at the shore."

So saying Skipper Vernon walked down to the sandy shore of the little harbor, and as he reached there Madge Vernon, the Girl Pilot, sprung from the skiff and affectionately greeted him.

"Well, Madge, I am delighted to see you back; but what has happened that you return in a skiff, and neither the Blue Bell, or your little sloop, or the Madcap, are here in the harbor?"

"It is a long story, father, and when we reach

the arbor on the cliff I will tell you all," was the answer of the maiden, and leaving Silly Sam and Melmer to look after the boat she walked on with her father.

Silly Sam was a village youth, having been reared in a hundred different duties, from sailor work to carting, and finding his home with an old cartman who had fancied him and cared for him, for the boy's parents had died when he was a mere lad, and left him, with a simple mind that won him his name, alone in the world.

A large form, powerfully built, agile as a cat, and brave as a lion, Silly Sam was a man whom no one cared to anger, while his big-hearted nature won for him many friends.

In years gone by he had been defended by Noel Brandon, the disgraced officer, and that had bound him to him with the strongest friendship.

He had often met Madcap Madge, and loved her, so that he became, as it were, her slave.

Melmer, a small-sized, stern-faced man, was one of the mates of the Blue Bell, Skipper Vernon's sloop, a man of few words and prompt action.

As the two just described lingered on the shore, Madge walked on up the hillside with her father.

Her clothing showed that she had been utterly drenched, and her hair was matted and wet.

Still, for all that, she was very beautiful, and seeming not to regard her appearance, threw herself down upon a rustic seat, that was beneath a small shelter on the very verge of the cliff, and said:

"Well, father, I have played the mischief since you have been away."

"It seems evident that you have, Madge; but tell me what has happened?" was the gruff response.

"Well, father, to begin, you know that one man escaped the night that three attacked Lieutenant Noel Brandon, when Silly Sam was driving him home?"

"Yes, one escaped, you told me."

"It was Darke Darrell."

"Ah! I have heard of him as a never-do-well fellow, whose widowed mother lives on the river above here."

"The same, sir, and he attempted to kill Mr. Brandon, for some reason, years ago, and fled, believing he had done so."

"Now he appears here on the scene, evidently following Mr. Brandon from Boston, to kill him, and made his escape when I went to the rescue."

"It was doubtless his sloop that I took as my prize and named the Madcap."

"Now, when the Scorpion gunboat came here to take Mr. Brandon back on the charge of killing his captain and robbing him, you know I went out as pilot, and finding out just what was to be done, warned the lieutenant and aided his escape."

"This fellow, Darke Darrell, found out his hiding-place, told him I sent him for him, and accompanied by that poor drunkard at the village, Tap-room Tom, took Mr. Brandon with him, cut out my little prize-sloop, the Madcap, and carried him to Boston."

"Where was the Blue Bell?"

"At anchor here, sir."

"And her crew did not see the Madcap cut out?"

"No, sir, although, father, I found half a score of men on board, besides Gaspard and Melmer, when I went on board the Blue Bell to go in search of the little sloop."

Captain Vernon started, his face flushed, and he said:

"You found then other men than Gaspard and Melmer?"

"Yes, sir, and surprised them, for they had been carousing during the night."

"What were those men on the Blue Bell for, Madge?" asked the skipper, glancing in a nervous way at his daughter.

"Gaspard said, father, that they were the crew of a wrecked smuggler vessel that you had picked up, and meant to take them to their home."

"Oh, yes, so they were."

"You see, Madge, as they were wrecked men, I could not give them over to the law, so told them they could have a boat and make their way to any point they wished."

"But I was called off up country, as you know, immediately after coming into port, and it seems they had not left the sloop."

"So it seems, sir; but I was glad, as it was, for they proved useful as a crew, as I started in the Blue Bell to find the Madcap, when I found she was gone, and that Mr. Brandon had been kidnapped from the cave where I had him in hiding."

"I ran to Portland, then to Boston and found the Madcap, with only Mr. Brandon on board, and he was so badly wounded he could not help himself."

"This Darrell, it seems, was determined to avenge himself on Noel Brandon, and also to get the reward of ten thousand dollars offered for him, and had gone on board the Scorpion to sell out, when I ran in, threw Gaspard and four men on the sloop, took Mr. Brandon on the Blue Bell, and then set sail."

"The Scorpion came in chase, searched the Madcap, then boarded the Blue Bell, and searched her—"

"And found Brandon?"

"Oh, no, father, for it was night, and I had him lowered over the bows in a hammock, and they did not find him."

"But Gaspard, lured by the reward, turned traitor, found me in the Madcap at Monhegan Island, the rendezvous I appointed, and getting the crew to mutiny took Mr. Brandon on the Madcap, leaving Melmer, Silly Sam and Tap-room Tom with me to bring the Blue Bell home."

"And Melmer remained true?"

"He did, sir."

"I shall not forget him for this."

"Nor I, father."

"And Gaspard proved a traitor?"

"Yes, sir, with the rest of the crew, and though we fought them, they took the prisoner."

"I shall not forget them for this."

"Nor I, father."

"And then?"

"Well, we started right off in the Blue Bell, for I determined to collect more fishermen and take Gaspard and his crew before he found the Scorpion."

"I sent Tom, Silly Sam and Melmer to look up the men, when, from the cliff here, I spied the Scorpion and saw the Madcap run alongside, after which the little sloop headed for Boston."

"And the Scorpion?" quickly asked skipper Vernon.

"She headed inshore, fired for a pilot, and I went out to her."

"Lieutenant Maynard, acting captain, had Mr. Brandon on board, Gaspard having given him up."

"And gotten the reward?"

"No, but he was to receive it when the Scorpion returned to Boston."

"The lieutenant had granted Noel Brandon's request to let him see his sister, and I ran the Scorpion into the Punch Bowl harbor and went up to Brandon Hall."

"Miss Brandon returned with me, and I came home, while she went on board the Scorpion."

"Here I found that you had not yet returned from your trip up the country, so I told Melmer to take the Blue Bell, with Sam and Tom, and run to Crescent Island and await me."

"Then I went back to the cutter, Miss Brandon was put ashore, and I took the wheel just as the storm broke."

"It was a fearful storm, Madge, and I am glad I did not know you were out in it."

"Oh! I was safe, for I made no mistakes, I can assure you, although I ran the Scorpion through the Devil's Caldron."

"On such a night you did this?" cried skipper Vernon, springing to his feet.

"Yes, sir."

"But why?"

"Well, father, I showed the lieutenant what kind of a place it was by daylight, and in pleasant weather, so in the storm ran him into it, and leaving the wheel told him I would not touch it again unless he pledged himself to set Mr. Brandon free."

"Ha! this was bold, and just like you, Madge; but did he agree?"

"He did, and kept his word, for I ran in under the lee of Crescent Isle."

"The Blue Bell was there; I hailed, and took Mr. Brandon on board, and then, after more delay, started home."

"In that storm?"

"Yes, sir, and I left Melmer on the Scorpion to pilot her out, but the tide was running in, and, as I could not weather the Twin Isles, I determined to run between them."

"Good God! it was impossible, except at highest tide and then in quiet weather."

"So I found out, father, for the Blue Bell went to pieces in just two minutes after she struck," was the cool reply.

"And you were saved, thank God."

"Yes, father, Sam grasped me, and, as we were both fine swimmers we reached the shore, though I think Sam saved my life, and it was a fearful ordeal to pass through."

"The noble fellow; but the wounded officer was drowned? Well! better so, than to die on the gallows."

"And Tap-room Tom, the poor drunkard, also was lost?"

"I have not seen them, father, since the Blue Bell struck," was the quiet reply.

"Poor fellows! well, you had better rig up, and take your pony and go over to Brandon Hall, for I like Miss Brandon, and it will be a relief to her to know that her brother was lost at sea, rather than have to die on the gallows, for, Madge, there were some bitter foes who were determined he should swing at the yard-arm."

"Yes, father, and if guilty of the crimes charged against him, it would be but justice that he should hang; but I do not believe he was guilty."

"Nor I, Madge; but let me see how we stand, for the Blue Bell is lost?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the Madcap has been run off with by that fellow Gaspard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'm ashore?"

"So it seems, father."

"Well, my child, you are safe and that is everything, while I have the money to purchase me another craft, and I shall go to Boston and do so, as soon as I have attended to some little business matters here on the coast, in connection with my trading."

"And I, father, will take the packet to-night for Boston, along with Melmer and Sam, and simply get the Madcap back, for that Gaspard shall not have her."

"Better leave that to me, Madge?"

"No, father, for I shall tell Gaspard I shall report him as a mutineer, unless he gives the sloop up, and then I will return home."

"But how was it, I forgot to ask you, that you got off of the islands after the wreck?"

"The Scorpion sent a boat ashore under Melmer, the next morning, and, after running the cutter out to sea, we took a skiff and came here."

"And the Scorpion has sailed for Boston?"

"Yes, father."

"You are sure?"

"So Captain Maynard told me, when I left him several hours ago, and he was to look in at Portland and Portsmouth on the way."

"Then you will doubtless reach Boston ahead of her, by going in the packet to-night, and you can have Maynard hold Gaspard for the stealing of the Madcap unless he gives her up."

"Yes, father, and I will do so; but now I will change my dress and go over to Brandon Hall to see Joyce," and half an hour after Madge was dashing along through the pine forest, mounted upon her shaggy little pony, that was as wild as a deer, yet found it impossible to unseat his fair rider, as she was as perfect a rider as a sailor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET RENDEZVOUS.

AFTER Madge held her interview with her father, telling him all that had occurred, skipper Vernon remained in the rustic arbor, or lookout, while she went up to the cottage and started upon her ride to Brandon Hall.

The skipper's face wore a troubled, anxious look, as soon as he was left alone, and rising he paced to and fro upon the very edge of the cliff, where a misstep would hurl him to his death a hundred feet below.

But his was a firm head, and he knew no such thing as fear.

"Well," he muttered, "I am glad that young Brandon escaped the gallows, guilty or not guilty, and I am not sorry that he is dead, as I feared Madge was becoming deeply interested in him, and she should not throw herself away upon one who was under the brand of murder."

"But I must have been wrong, for she takes his death most coolly, not a tear or a regret, and doubtless only acted from a love of adventure and daring which seems born in her."

"Well, I am glad she is going after the little sloop, for it will give me a chance to get out that buried cargo, which it would be hard to do under her sharp eyes."

"Now to go up to the retreat and let the crew know of Gaspard's dastard act, and see what is best to be done."

So saying skipper Vernon called to Melmer, who with Silly Sam was on the way up to the cottage.

"You had a hard time of it, Melmer, you and Sam," he said.

"Sam had, sir, along with Miss Madge, while the fugitive officer and poor Tap-room Tom got the worst of it," answered Melmer.

"Well, Melmer, you did nobly, and I make you my chief mate, in place of that traitor Gaspard, while Sam, I wish you to make this your home, and you are to be a kind of protector to Madge, so go up to the village, get your traps and come here to live, for I'll give you more wages than you can earn with Saunders the cartman."

"It's so kind of you, skipper; but it's not wages I care for, only a home, and as you say I can come here I will do so, and you won't have cause to complain of me," and Sam seemed delighted at his prospects, for he would be near Madge, and hastened off to the village as fast as he could, the skipper telling him to return on the packet schooner, which Madge and Melmer would board off the harbor, and join him, for the run to Boston after the sloop.

"Now, Melmer, what does Gaspard's treachery mean?" asked Skipper Vernon when he was alone with his mate.

"Gold turned his head, sir."

"Yet he was making good money."

"Yes, captain, but not ten thousand in a lump, and it made him wild."

"Do you think he'll come back to the retreat?"

"He won't dare to, sir."

"And do you think he'll sell us out?"

"That I don't know, sir; if he could get his pardon and a handsome sum, I would not trust him."

"Nor I, so the retreat had better be moved."

"I should think so, captain."

"I will at once see to it, and fortunately there are several places I have in mind."

"Will you use the little sloop, when you get her, sir, in place of the Blue Bell?"

"Oh, no, for I must have another craft of like size with the Blue Bell."

"Now I will go to the retreat, and should I not get back in time to see my daughter off on the packet, tell her I have gone up to the village to see about another craft."

"Yes, sir."

"And take care of Madge, Melmer."

"I will, sir."

"And should you be able to capture Gaspard, fetch him back with you."

"Yes, captain," and Melmer walked in toward the cottage, while Captain Vernon, or skipper, as he was most generally called, walked down to the shore.

Here were lying upon the sands half a dozen boats of various sizes and kinds.

One of these, a sailing skiff, he shoved into the water, sprung in, raised the sail, and headed out of the harbor.

Rounding the point of rocks, the rocky arm that formed the safe little haven, he headed down the coast, keeping close in-shore.

The wind was off the sea, and fair, and he held close along, just out of the breakers, for a couple of leagues.

The coast was a most dangerous one, and what appeared like safe harbors here and there, were, in case of a storm from certain quarters, the most dangerous anchorages.

Upon a hill, surrounded by ornamental grounds, and setting far back from the shore, was Brandon Hall, the elegant mansion of Dr. Brandon, the father of the fugitive officer.

"Madge is there now, for I see her horse at the rock," muttered the skipper, turning his glass upon the grand old place as he sailed along the shore.

Passing the basin, which served as the harbor for Brandon Hall, and which was never safe with the wind off the sea, the skipper held on until he came to a rock-bound peninsula with wild-looking shores upon every side, and the top crowned with a thick growth of hardy pines.

About the base of this point, which ended abruptly, the waters surged and dashed in the quietest weather, and there were legends among the old fishermen, that a small boat going near would be dashed to pieces, or drawn bodily into huge caves that were said to be under the rocks.

But this danger the skipper did not seem to dread, as he lowered his sail, took his oars and headed through the foaming waters.

The spray dashed over him, sending up misty clouds far above his head, but, seated with his face to the bow, and his oars grasped firmly, he guided the skiff landward, his eyes upon a distant tree growing upon a cliff half a mile away.

"After the storm of last night the sea is fearfully wild," he muttered, as the seething waters swept around him.

At last he drew near the cliff, and dropping his oars caught hold of the rocky wall, thus allowing the skiff to move along until suddenly it came to an opening not more than twenty feet wide, and through which the waters swept like a mill-race.

Into this the skiff went, while upon either side, far above his head arose towering cliffs.

Dashing along for a couple of hundred feet the skiff swept into a basin, a fourth of an acre in size.

Here the water bubbled and foamed viciously, and found vent through innumerable caves that were around the rocky walls.

Upon the opposite side, fretting as she lay, yet with her sides protected by huge fenders, was a sloop, her topmast housed, so that her mast did not appear above the summit of the point.

It was a beautiful craft, about thirty tons burden, sharp as a razor forward and with a lean, swallow-like stern, while she had considerable breadth of beam amidships.

Her boom, gaff, topmast and bowsprit showed that she was capable of spreading a vast amount of sail, while her build indicated that she would carry it well even in a hard blow.

Even with the top of her bulwarks was a shelf of rock, upon which sat half a score of men, some on chains, others on boxes, and one lying at full length upon a blanket.

The appearance of this strange basin, the sailor-like looking men, the trim craft lying there where no one would have suspected a vessel could find anchorage or hiding-place, indicated that all was not right with her, or else why this secret retreat?

As the skiff swept into the basin the men sprung to their feet, and as Skipper Vernon ran alongside the sloop and stepped on board, he was met by the entire party.

"Well, captain, we are glad to see you," said a tall, fine-looking young sailor, the one who had been stretched at ease on his blanket.

Skipper Vernon bowed in his reserved way, and glancing over the faces before him, said sternly:

"Men, are any one of you present traitors?"

The men started, and each gazed at the other,

and then into their captain's face, while the young man before referred to, said:

"Out with it, captain, if any of us have gone wrong, and let them suffer, while we know just who they are."

"Glendon, I do not suspect you nor any other man here; but then, neither did I believe that Gaspard and his crew would go wrong."

"And they have?" cried several voices.

"Betrayed us?" asked Glendon.

"The fact is, they have not betrayed us—at least, not yet—but they have been traitors, for when on board the Blue Bell, they got a chance to make ten thousand in gold by delivering up a friend of mine whom my daughter was protecting, and they were led by Gaspard in seizing the wounded officer and giving him over to the commander of the Scorpion."

"My daughter did not submit tamely, Melmer sided with her, and there was a death or two among the traitors; but they carried off the officer, ran away with my daughter's sloop, the Madcap, and are now gone to Boston to get their reward, and, perhaps, to betray us for more gold."

Dark looks rested upon the faces of all, as they heard the words of Skipper Vernon, and Glendon said sternly:

"Gaspard should be run to earth and meet the punishment which he deserves."

"Yes, and those who sided with him," said others.

"He may be taken, for my daughter goes tonight to Boston to look up her little sloop, and Melmer will accompany her; but, lads, I have to report the loss of the Blue Bell, the sister craft to your sloop here the Kidnapper," and Skipper Vernon pointed to the sloop, which was the very counterpart of the wrecked vessel, from keel to truck, paint and all.

Then he told the story of her loss, as given to him by Madge, and the men received the news with deep regret.

"We must get another craft as a foil, sir, but I doubt if we can secure one as good as the Blue Bell was without having it built," remarked Glendon.

"The Kidnapper will do for the present, for I have another plan in hand that has not taken shape yet, as I hope it will before long; but, in the mean time, lads, we must change our rendezvous, for fear Gaspard may pounce down upon us with the scorpion, and he knows well that he could bring the armed cutter in here even, when the sea is not as wild as it is to day."

"He could indeed, sir, did he wish to; but where shall we go?"

"Get the cargo out of the cave, Glendon, and into the craft's hold, and I will run you to a place I have known of for some time, and which I believe is just as sure a hiding retreat as this, and with a chance of escape if we are hemmed in while if surprised, the vessel would have to go."

"True, sir, and I'll have the cargo on shortly: but will you sail by daylight?"

"No, just at nightfall; but we will have to wait until dawn to feel our way into our new retreat, as I do not know the channel too well."

Glendon then called the men to set to work, while Skipper Vernon entered the cabin of the Kidnapper and taking a book out of a secret receptacle over the transom, began to examine it closely.

"I have done well the past year, and I am no longer a poor man; but I do not like this life, and long for something else."

"Well, it will come soon, it will come soon, and then some day I go back to the old home and my revenge will be complete: but not now, not now must I think of that, for there is work before me yet to be done."

So saying he returned the book to its place, and, going upon deck found a busy scene.

The men were hard at work, some bringing boxes and bales out of the cave in the cliff, and others stowing them into the hold at the sloop.

It was late in the afternoon when the work was ended, and just at nightfall the sloop was started from her moorings alongside of the rocky shelf.

No sail was set, and the tide, going out, bore her through the pass of rocks, the men warding her off from the cliff on either side.

Out into the cove, on one side of the point, she tossed about upon the rough waters, but still was swept seaward, and soon sail was set, and Skipper Vernon taking the helm, headed her away from the secret retreat, to seek another haven of refuge.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE AND PRIDE.

At a pace that seemed to chime in well with her humor, Madge held on her way to Brandon Hall.

It was a lordly estate, surrounded by thousands of acres of wild pine lands, hill, vale and meadows, with picturesque scenery on every side and the blue ocean stretching away in front.

It had been the home of the Brandons for several generations, having been erected by one who had come over from England to seek a home in America, and who had possessed vast wealth, so that he had been enabled to live a

life of luxury in the new land to which he had come.

He had built a structure in style like the old English homestead, with numerous wings, a court, several stories and gabled roofs, until it looked like a castle, with its towers and vast space.

Surrounding it on three sides were flower gardens, a velvet lawn and park in front, and in the rear vegetable gardens, stables, and the necessary buildings belonging to a vast farm.

The revenue of the estate was not large, but then Doctor Brandon, the lord and master, owned large real estate interests in Boston and other cities and his income was a handsome one, while Brandon Hall Farm gave him at least a living.

A proud man, Doctor Brandon was one who had no intimate friends among the country folk, and seemed happy in his home life with his wife and children, the latter being, at the opening of this story, Noel, a son of twenty-five, and Joyce a daughter of eighteen.

Mrs. Brandon was a weak woman, handsome in face and graceful in form, but wholly influenced by her husband, and consequently she had reared her children to look down upon all who were not their equal in wealth and family.

Yet, strange to say, that though her false training had its effect, it still did not influence either Noel or Joyce to become like their parents.

Noel had shown a love for the sea from early boyhood, and had early entered the American Navy, to return home, after years of gallant service, in disgrace through dismissal, and then to be hunted down for a crime that was horrible in its atrocity, as he was accused of it.

The blow had been a bitter one to his parents and sister, but the former would offer one thus accused, though their son, no protection whatever, and they left him to his fate.

With his beautiful sister, it was different, for she had become the strong ally of Madcap Madge Vernon to save him.

As for Madge, it seemed as though she was acting from love for the branded sailor, and yet she would not admit it, and said she was prompted only by gratitude.

But she had pledged herself to save the life of Noel Brandon, to keep him out of the hands of justice, until he was able to help himself and could prove his innocence, and then she hoped he would be able to do so.

When, therefore, she had made the condition, of saving the Scorpion from wreck, that Lieutenant Maynard should surrender his prisoner to her, she but carried out her determined resolve, and gained her point.

The loss of the Blue Bell, and what followed, the reader knows, and it was to tell Doctor Brandon and his wife and daughter, of the fate of the Blue Bell, that Madge went over to Brandon Hall.

As she dashed up to the doorway, Doctor Brandon was pacing the piazza, alternately glancing over the ocean, and looking down with studied silence, as though lost in deep and painful reverie.

In one of the open windows sat Mrs. Brandon, her hands clasped in her lap and her eyes seemingly not seeing the sea, though turned upon it.

The faces of both showed suffering.

Presently there came out upon the piazza a perfect vision of beauty, though the sunny light upon her face was dimmed by sadness.

It was Joyce Brandon.

"Joyce, Bruce the boatman tells me that you went on board the United States war-cutter Scorpion yesterday, for he says it anchored in our bay for a few hours?" said her father.

"I did, sir."

"Why did you do so, and why did you not inform your mother and myself of the fact?"

"You were away, father, with mother, when the Scorpion came into the harbor, and I went on a mission which is a forbidden subject to you."

"Ha! was my son—I mean Noel Brandon on board?" asked the doctor, eagerly.

"He was, sir."

"They have captured him, then?"

"Yes, father."

The strong man seemed choking up with feeling for a moment, while Mrs. Brandon groaned forth:

"God have mercy!"

"Where was he taken?"

"It seems that those he trusted delivered him up to the Scorpion, to get the large reward offered."

"Ha! the Vernons, pretending to be his friends sold him for gold—I knew that such was the nature of those very common people."

"You are mistaken, sir, for the Vernons shielded him where his own parents deserted him," was the angry retort of Joyce.

"How dare you speak thus, Joyce?"

"Did you expect your mother and I to shield an assassin, a robber?"

"Father, it is not proven that poor brother Noel is guilty."

"He was charged with being, and Lieutenant Maynard told me that your brother's cloak and weapons were found in the room of the murdered man, while it is well known that he had caused the dismissal of Noel from the navy, and

hence his hatred for him, while, to cover up his debts through his fast life he robbed him.

"Do you not so believe, wife?"

"Yes, husband, I believe as you do, though it is hard to think evil of our child," was the low reply.

"Why Noel came home here in disgrace, having shot his superior officer—"

"A man who persecuted him until patience ceased to be a virtue, because Noel was a brave, dashing, handsome fellow, who had been promoted rapidly, and who felt a petty spite of him. While his captain, a man without a soul, joined the lieutenant in his petty persecutions.

"Driven to madness, Noel resented the insults, and killed his superior in a duel, and had to be punished by dismissal.

"Was that all? No, his captain went to New York, and tainted the ears of the admiral against Noel and tried to further put his heel upon him.

"He owed a large gambling debt he did not wish to pay, and the result was he wished to ruin him.

"How ended it, my father and my mother?"

"At a hotel where he stopped the captain was murdered in his room one night, and a large sum of money he was known to have had was gone, while Noel's cloak and weapons were found there.

"Noel left that night, was conceded guilty under all circumstances, and so was hunted down.

"He was captured yesterday, and Lieutenant Maynard granted his request to see me.

"He is wounded severely, and unable to help himself, and they are taking him to Boston to hang him, for he'll never be given a fair trial in the heat of this charge against him.

"He told me all, and I believe him innocent, and I bade him good-by forever.

"Now you know why I went on the Scorpion, and, if it were not that the innocent would suffer, I could pray that the vessel went down in that fearful storm last night, and Noel thus died, and thereby escaped the gallows."

Joyce spoke with quick tone, and in an impressive way, and her parents listened in silence, and in pain, for their pride struggled with their love for their boy, and they cared not to do one ought to save him, believing him guilty.

"I am sorry the shot of the highwayman did not kill, instead of wounding him," said the father, while his wife said:

"Yes; for it is fearful, the thought that one of our name should end his life on the gallows!"

A look of scorn passed over the face of Joyce, but she made no reply, and turning, beheld a horse and rider dashing up the drive toward the mansion.

"Oh! it is Madge, and she evidently brings news of poor Noel!" he cried.

"Ha! that wild, reckless girl it is, and she is coming here. What can she want in our house?" said Doctor Brandon.

"I will soon know, father, and I sincerely hope it is to tell us that Noel has escaped."

"For our honor's sake, to save him from a disgraceful death, I could hope so; otherwise I could wish that he might meet the punishment his crimes deserve," was the unfeeling remark of the proud and heartless father.

A moment after, Madcap Madge dashed up to the door, and sprung to the ground.

CHAPTER VI. STRANGE TIDINGS.

THE face of Madcap Madge was flushed with her rapid ride, her hair had become unfastened and fell in waves about her shoulders, her riding-habit fitted her exquisite form to perfection, and she looked very beautiful indeed as she threw herself from her pony and walked up the stone steps leading to the piazza.

Doctor Brandon gazed upon her with admiration, in spite of himself, and his wife was forced to admit that the daughter of a poor coast skipper was the equal of their lovely daughter.

Joyce at once met Madge and warmly kissed her, while, taking her hand she led her a step toward her parents and said:

"Father, mother, this is Miss Vernon, a new-found friend, and who has been so stanch in her friendship to poor brother Noel."

"H'm! no doubt; but may I ask to what circumstance we are indebted to Miss Vernon for her call?" haughtily said Doctor Brandon.

"It was not, sir, to seek a favor, or to be received as a visitor, I assure you; but, having been on board a vessel last night that was wrecked, I came over to inform you of the fact, that you might know that your son had escaped dying at the yard-arm."

Madcap Madge spoke in a cold tone, with her eyes resting alternately upon the face of the doctor and his wife, and in a manner that showed no pity for them.

"God be merciful," moaned Joyce, "for it is better so; but tell us, Madge, all about it," and the beautiful eyes filled with tears.

Mrs. Brandon bowed her head upon her hands and looked the picture of grief, her love struggling with her pride, while Doctor Brandon turned his face momentarily away, and with an effort controlled his emotion so as to ask in a low tone:

"You mean that Noel is dead?"

"I will tell you the circumstances, sir, if you desire to hear them, for it was for that reason I came here, thinking you would be relieved to know that your son did not have to meet a far worse fate."

"Yes, tell us all, and then we will bury his name, his memory from sight."

"Ah, father! I never can, for memory will not always down at the bidding," sighed Joyce, and then turning to Madge she continued:

"Now tell us all that occurred after I left the Scorpion."

"My poor, poor brother—how glad I am that I bade him farewell yesterday, and heard from his lips that he was innocent, for I believe him, I do, indeed."

"And so do I," bluntly said Madge.

"The circumstances prove his guilt," coldly remarked the doctor.

"Circumstantial evidence has caused many an innocent man to hang," came the part remark from Madge, but before Doctor Brandon could reply, she continued:

"I was acting pilot on board the Scorpion, and in the worst part of the storm, determined that Mr. Brandon should escape, and thereby have every chance to prove his innocence. I left the wheel and refused to touch it again unless Captain Maynard pledged himself to set the prisoner free."

"Girl, did you dare do this?" cried Doctor Brandon in utter amazement, while his wife raised her head from her hands, and gazed in wonder at the daring girl.

"Oh, Madge, how daring you are!" said Joyce.

"I saw that it was the only chance to save Mr. Brandon, and I gained my point; for he was released, after I had run the Scorpion under the lee of Crescent Isle.

"I had, in the afternoon, ordered my father's sloop, the Blue Bell—"

"The craft they say he goes smuggling in?" rudely said Doctor Brandon.

"For shame, father!" cried Joyce, but unmoved Madcap Madge replied:

"Yes, sir; the same craft that men call a smuggler, and that some even say is a coast pirate, as she is so mysterious in her movements; but I had ordered the Blue Bell to the island, as I said, and on board was a man to pilot the Scorpion, for I went on board my little sloop, along with Mr. Brandon."

"Maynard released him, then?"

"Yes, sir, Captain Maynard is a man of honor, and he acted wisely in releasing his prisoner."

"But you would not have carried out your threat?"

"It seems that he thought that I would, and it was well enough that he should, as it turned out."

"He gave the prisoner, your son, over to me, and I went on board the sloop, leaving the pilot on the Scorpion to run her out to sea when she wished to sail."

"And who was on the sloop?"

"Only a poor unfortunate youth who is known as Silly Sam, and an equally wretched creature whose curse is drink, and who bears the name of Tap-room Tom."

"I know them both, and you seem honored in your acquaintances."

"Are we to receive visits from Silly Sam and Tap-room Tom too?" sneered the man.

Madge smiled, but made no reply, while Joyce gave her father a look of indignation and praise commingled.

"Having gone on board the sloop, sir, I set sail, determined to get out of the way of the Scorpion as soon as possible, and I tried to weather the southeast point of the Twin Rocks, or islands, but failed, so headed for the Reef Pass between them."

"Here wind and wave were against me, the tide also, and so I struck and the Blue Bell went to pieces in an instant."

"Great God! and my son?"

"You are aware, sir, that Mr. Brandon was unable to help himself, wounded as he was, and in that wild sea it is strange that any of us lived."

"Ah! you alone escaped?"

"No, for Silly Sam also escaped, and to his great strength and superb swimming, I feel that I owe it that I was not dashed to pieces upon the rocks."

"And my son was lost?" and the voice of the man quivered in spite of himself, while Mrs. Brandon again buried her face in her hands.

"Silly Sam and I alone reached the shore, and I have not seen your son or Tap-room Tom since."

"But his body can be found?"

"It would be useless to search for it, sir, and in the sea a sailor loves to be buried."

"So let it be, and the end has come better than on the gallows," and Doctor Brandon stepped toward his wife whose whole form quivered.

"Yes, it is better so, and to end your suspense I came," said Madge.

"And also to claim pay for the loss of your vessel?" and Doctor Brandon turned quickly toward Madge.

The eyes of the maiden flashed fire, but she said with perfect calmness:

"Doctor Brandon, I loved the Blue Bell far more than you did your son; but I would not touch your gold to save your life, when I would give my gold and risk my life for the sake of your unfortunate son and noble-hearted daughter."

Without another word Madge wheeled on her heel, drew her skirt about her, and grasping the hand of Joyce walked out toward her waiting pony, while Doctor Brandon went to the side of his wife.

"Ah! Madge, how cruelly you have been insulted, in return for all that you have done for me and mine," and the tears filled the eyes of Joyce.

"Do not mind me, my dear Joyce, for if your father shows no feeling for his own flesh and blood, I certainly cannot expect to command his respect; but, Joyce, you have heard my story of the wreck of the Blue Bell, and it happened as I have said; but let me say to you one thing."

"Well?"

"I give no clew to interpret my words, I tell you nothing more than to say, *hope to yet see your brother again!*"

"Madge! Madge!"

"There, ask no questions—only *hope*, and keep that hope locked in your bosom where no one can see it."

"Good-by!" and springing lightly into her saddle Madge bounded away, leaving Joyce standing where she had left her, and like one in a dream, or dazed, while she murmured over and over again:

"Can her words mean that Noel yet lives?"

CHAPTER VII.

IN SEARCH OF THE MADCAP.

WHEN Madcap Madge returned to her little cottage home, she was surprised to learn that her father had gone away somewhere and might not get back before her departure for Boston on the packet.

She questioned both Philip and Phillis closely, but they could give her no information as to where he had gone, and then she sought Melmer, and he, too, was ignorant, or pretended to be.

"He appointed me mate, instead of Gaspard, lady," said Melmer.

"You deserve it, Melmer, but you are a mate without a craft now," she answered.

"Well, I guess we'll get one soon."

"I hope so; but how did my father go?"

"In his skiff, miss."

"Up or down the coast?"

"Dunno, miss."

"This is strange; but perhaps Sam can tell me something about it."

"Sam has gone to the village, miss, and will come down on the packet."

"Ah! how provoking!" and thoroughly mystified at her father's act, Madge returned to the cottage and began her preparations for her departure.

She got Phillis to bring out a small hair trunk—a relic in the family—and this she packed to suit herself, and Philip carried it down to the shore and placed it in the boat in which they were to go out and meet the packet.

After all was in readiness, Madge ate a hearty supper, and then, as it was growing late and a good breeze told her that the schooner must soon be along, she called to Melmer, and they walked down to the skiff, Philip accompanying them to bring the boat back.

As they got out of the little harbor, they saw the schooner coming down at a slapping pace, and as she headed toward the cove, Madge knew that Silly Sam was on board and had obeyed his instructions.

The schooner soon luffed slowly, and when her headway had been greatly checked, the boat ran on the lee quarter, and Madge, Melmer and the baggage were on board in an instant, while the craft dashed on, leaving the negro dancing in the wake, as he seized the cars to pull back home.

"Well, Sam, I am glad to see you looking so well," said Madge, as that youth met her at the side, and she saw that he had a new sailor suit on and had had his hair neatly trimmed.

"Yes, Miss Madge, I spruced up, as I was going to the big city, and your father has told me that I am to live at your cottage and be the crew of your sloop, when you get her."

"I will be delighted, Sam, and you really look elegant in your new clothes; but here is Captain West, and I must see about a state-room."

"State-rooms is pretty expensive, Miss Madge, but you can get a bunk cheap," volunteered Sam, with an eye to economy.

"No, I wish a state-room, and I guess there are very few on the schooner. Good-evening, Captain West."

And Madge turned to a jolly-looking old sailor who advanced toward her, having just come out of the cabin, where he had been eating his supper.

"Why, it's Skipper Vernon's wild daughter! Lor' bless you, Miss Madge, I'm proud to see you a passenger on my craft, and blow hard as

Satan's bellows, I'd have no fear with your pretty face on deck."

And the captain warmly grasped the maiden's hand.

"Then I'm not to be put ashore for want of room, captain?"

"Not you, for we are not crowded; in fact, travel is awful light just now; but if we were full, I'd give up my state-room to you every time."

"This is my new schooner, Miss Madge, the largest Kennebec craft afloat, being three hundred tons, and has the finest cabin and state-rooms to be found, and you get the best, the bridal state-room, though you hain't on your wedding-trip; but I hope to carry you and your husband some day."

"Come right below and the stewardess will look after your comfort, and the steward will get you some supper."

"I've had supper, thank you, Captain West," and Madge went below and was ushered into the really sumptuous state-room to which the gallant old sailor assigned her.

"Isn't she a beauty, Miss Madge?"

"She is indeed; but I did not know you had a new vessel, and was surprised to see her coming to pick us up."

"She is a good sailor too."

"Indeed yes, and can show her heels to any craft in these waters, unless it be your Blue Bell, Miss Madge, and she's a witch to sail, for fast as was my old craft, she'd run me hull down in a few hours, as I've often had your father do; but, Miss Madge, I call her the Queen o' the Kennebec, as you have been sometimes called."

"A good name, captain, I am sure, and I wish her every success; but I must go on deck and see how she sails."

"Certain! come right along and if there's any passengers you want to know, I'll introduce you."

"No, thank you, I do not care to know any one."

"Then make yourself at home, and if you wish to take the wheel do so, for you are same as captain on my craft, as I hain't forgot how one stormy night, when I couldn't get into harbor, you came out and run me in, and Lord bless you, my child, Davy Jones would have gotten the schooner and all of us then if you hadn't done as you did."

"That was little to do, captain, and you'd have been all right if your pilot hadn't been too ill to take the wheel."

"Yes, he was sick, and I didn't dare trust myself in such a night to run in; but you did it and God bless you for it; but who is the seaman with you?"

"The mate of the Blue Bell, and Silly Sam."

"Is he with you too?"

"Yes, for my father has taken him into his service, and I will tell you a secret."

"Yes, you can trust me; but I do hope you hain't going to marry that durned fool, for folks says he loves you as a rat does cheese."

Madge blushed and laughed, while she answered:

"No indeed, I do not intend to marry, captain; but poor Sam is not the fool people call him, and he has a good heart."

"No doubt, and I like him, only not as your husband. "Why if I thought you'd look at him I'd shine up to you myself, for I've got a snug home in the village, though it's rented since my wife died, I've got two schooners, a daughter who is a-teachin' school, and having been married onst myself, I knows something of how to treat a wife, so you has it pat, Miss Madge, that I'm willing any time you say the word."

"I thank you for the honor done me, captain; but I have never thought of matrimony, and now I wish to pay you that passage money, and tell you that secret!"

"Ah, yes, you were going to tell me a secret and I told you mine, that I loved you; but you, don't pay no passage money on this schooner, and the two men can lend a hand, and so it will be nothing for them."

"But you didn't tell me the secret."

"No, how forgetful of me; but I will do so now, and it is that I am going to Boston in search of my little sloop, Madcap, which was cut out from her anchorage the other night, and taken there."

"Ah! and you are going after her?"

"Yes, and the two men, Sam and Melmer, are to aid me."

"I see; but call on me if I can serve you, Miss Madge."

"I'll not forget your kind offer, should I need other aid, Captain West; but is that not a sail yonder, just coming around the island?"

"It is, and she goes along like a race-horse."

"These are dangerous times, Miss Madge, and we must keep our eyes open, so I'll get my glass and take a better look at the craft," and the honest old captain walked away, while Silly Sam, at a call from Madge, came to her side.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SLOOP.

WHEN Madge called Silly Sam to her side, it was to have a talk with him regarding the disappearance of her father, just before her depar-

ture on the packet schooner, for at a glance, her keen eyes saw through the darkness what the somewhat eye-dimmed vision of Captain Ike had failed to discern, viz.: that the strange sail was a sloop, and a much smaller vessel than was the Queen of the Kennebec.

"Sam, do you know where my father went this afternoon?" she asked, dismissing the sail altogether.

"No, Miss Madge, I do not."

"He left home, and gave out that he might not return in time to see me leave, and he did not get back."

"Now, father has been up country, on the business that usually takes him there several times a year, whatever that is, and I can see no reason for his leaving home as he did to-day, and with the evident intention of remaining away some time."

"He did not go gunning, for his guns were at home, and he could not have gone off fishing just at that time."

"We have ample stores at home, and so he need not have gone to the village, and he did not, for he went down the coast, now I think of it."

"I didn't see him in the town, Miss Madge."

"I cannot exactly understand it, Sam; but here comes Captain West, and he is anxious about yonder sail."

The captain just then came up with his spy-glass and turned it upon the distant sail, while he said:

"Now, Miss Madge, we'll know just what that fellow is, and I see he is on a course to be near us when we get our offing and head for Boston."

"Yes, Captain West, he holds on the course that you will take, and it is a sloop."

"Ah! have your pretty eyes discovered that already?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain turned his glass upon the stranger at once, while Sam and Madge quietly awaited for him to speak.

The schooner was dashing along under an eight-knot breeze, and in half an hour more she would gain an offing where, with the wind from where it then was, she could point for port.

The new vessel was stanch, comfortable, a fast sailer, and won the admiration of Madge as she watched her.

"Miss Madge?"

"Captain West."

"That is a sloop."

"So I said, sir."

"A very trim-looking craft, and she bowls along at a merry pace for the wind she has."

"She seems to sail well, though it is too dark to see much about her."

"Miss Madge, yonder craft is the image of your father's sloop."

"The Blue Bell?"

"Yes, Miss Madge, it is the Blue Bell, so that we have nothing to fear."

"It is not the Blue Bell, captain."

"There you are wrong, Miss Madge."

"No, sir."

"Take the glass and see for yourself, for I have sailed too often in company with the pretty Blue Bell not to know her."

"Still I say it is not the Blue Bell."

"Did you leave the Bell in the harbor, Miss Madge?"

"Captain West, the Blue Bell was wrecked last night, in the storm, and Sam and I had a struggle for life, for we were on board of her."

"No!"

"It is true, sir."

"But look at yonder craft."

"I do, sir."

"And it is not the Blue Bell?"

"No, sir."

"Then, by the beard of Neptune, it is her ghost," cried the old sailor, earnestly.

Madge took the glass and gave a long look through it.

"Well, Miss Madge?"

"It is enough like the Blue Bell to be her ghost."

Sam then took the glass and gazed through it.

"It looks like her, Miss Madge."

"Why, it's the counterpart of the Blue Bell, and I don't like the idea of sailing in company with a spirit craft, Miss Madge," and the old sailor spoke in a whisper.

"Do you believe in such things, captain?"

"Certainly I do, miss, and what sailor don't?"

Madge made no reply, but told Sam to tell Melmer to come to her.

The mate soon arrived and the maiden said:

"Melmer, take this glass and tell me if you know yonder sloop."

Melmer took a hasty glance and then said, quickly:

"It's the Blue Bell, miss; but no, that cannot be, for she went to pieces last night."

"Ah! it's the—" But Melmer suddenly stopped.

"The what?"

"I don't know, miss."

"You were going to say it was some vessel."

"I meant to say, miss, it's the ghost of the Blue Bell."

"So Captain West says."

"Right, I do, my man, and it would not sur-

prise me to see her sail by us with a dead man or a spirit at her helm."

"We will soon see just what she is, Captain West, for she looks as though she intended to keep us company."

"No, Miss Madge, I'll run back into port for I would not hold the wheel with yonder spook craft keeping company with us, and this the first voyage of the Kennebec Queen, too."

"Why, captain, you take it too deeply to heart, for though there is a remarkable resemblance between yonder sloop and my father's Blue Bell, yet there are numbers of vessels that closely resemble each other."

"Miss Madge, I know the Blue Bell well, and my glass is a strong one, and I got a good light upon yonder craft, and man don't make two vessels so alike as she is and your sloop—why see, the very marks in her sails are the same," and the old sailor turned his glass again upon the strange sail, which was now not more than a quarter of a mile distant, sailing dead before the wind, while the Kennebec Queen had the breeze upon her port.

"You are right, sir, and it is a coincidence."

"Yes, and I tell you I don't like it, and I see my crew are getting nervous about it, and my helmsman will leave the wheel, if I don't put back."

"Permit me to take the wheel, captain."

"It's death to the man at the wheel, Miss Madge, to cruise in company with a spook craft."

"I'm not a man, however, so I'll take my chances."

This reasoning the old captain did not gainsay, and Madge stepped to the wheel, while Silly Sam said:

"Miss Madge, you don't believe in spooks and shadow ships, but I do."

"I have never seen a spirit craft or a spook, Sam, and until I do, I cannot believe in such things," was the quiet reply, as Madge took the wheel, to the great delight of the helmsman whose turn it had been.

"I guess we better put back into the river, miss, for I don't like the looks of yonder craft," said Melmer, in a low tone to Madge.

"Melmer, what is yonder craft?" she asked, quickly.

"I don't know, miss."

"I believe you know more than you will tell, for I saw you seemed surprised and anxious awhile ago."

"It isn't the Blue Bell, I know, miss."

"Do you believe it to be the ghost of the Blue Bell?"

"I do not know what to believe, miss."

Madge looked fixedly at the man, for she seemed to read intuitively that he knew something about the strange craft which he would not reveal, and it annoyed her.

Just then a man came hastily upon deck and glanced around him.

He was a shrewd-faced man of middle age, and a passenger on board having gotten on the schooner at an up-river town where he was a merchant.

"What is it I hear, that a pirate is in chase of us?" he said, eagerly.

"No pirate is in chase, sir, and only a small sloop is near us," answered Melmer.

"What is the girl doing at the wheel?" he continued.

"The captain allows her there, sir," Sam remarked.

"I shall not bring my merchandise again upon a craft that takes the chances of letting a girl have control."

"Why, you land-lubber, she knows more about a craft than I do myself—for that's Madcap Madge, the Girl Pilot o' the Kennebec," said Captain West, just then coming aft.

"Madcap Madge! I have heard of her," and the man turned away, but resumed:

"I'd rather you'd take the wheel, captain."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, sir; but I'd rather you'd go below and mind your own business."

"It is my business to know if it was a pirate, for, as you know, I have a valuable cargo on board, and—" here he whispered to the captain, "a great deal of money."

"Well, yonder craft don't want your goods or your money, for it's a spirit sloop, the ghost o' the Blue Bell, lost last night in the storm."

The man started and turned pale, while he muttered:

"The Blue Bell?"

"Yes."

Instantly he turned to Captain West and asked:

"You say she was lost last night in the storm?"

"She was."

"Who was her skipper?"

"Captain Nick Vernon, the father o' this leddy."

"Ah! and was he lost?" eagerly asked the man.

"No, and hain't likely to be in these waters."

The man glanced at Madge, muttered something that was inaudible and hastily went below, just as Madge said:

"Stand by to let her sails swing, for we will now head for Boston, and get the wind dead aft."

"All ready, miss!" called out Captain West,

and, as the helm was put down the foresail was swung to port, the mainsail remaining to starboard, and wing and wing the Kennebec Queen sped along, the strange sloop thus thrown in her wake astern, and not a cable's length away.

CHAPTER IX.

CHASED BY A "SPOOK CRAFT."

As the strange sloop now came on, dead in the wake of the schooner, Madge had a chance to recognize how perfectly alike she was to what the Blue Bell had been.

She knew the latter vessel, to every spot in her sail almost, and this craft was certainly her counterpart in everything.

The moon was now up, and, though on the wane, and the night being cloudy, it still gave light enough to have Madge see the strange sloop thoroughly, and, asking Melmer to take the wheel, she gazed long and attentively through her glass at the stranger.

"Isn't that the Blue Bell's ghost, Miss Madge?"

"It looks so, Captain West."

"Now we hain't got nothing to fear from the craft, as far as her being a bloody pirate is concerned, for I has two six-pounders, as you see, and two dozen muskets, with a few cutlasses, for the Queen is fitted out prime, miss, first-class."

"Then I has a mate, bo'sen, and six in crew, not to speak of my cook and steward, so you see I'm physically fixed, while here are your two men and three male passengers to give us a hand in case of attack."

"Don't you count me in, captain?"

"Well now I do, so we has all told sixteen men-folks, you, Miss Madge, and a plucky girl you be, and the stewardess to hollow and four lady passengers to help her scare the pirates off with their yelling."

"But do you think the little sloop can be a pirate, sir?"

"Not I, and if I had a hundred guns I would not turn one on yonder craft, for I believes it to be a spook, and iron, powder and lead don't hurt them kind—do they, Miss Madge?"

"I never had occasion to try powder and lead upon spooks or goblins, Captain West; but do you see that the sloop is gaining?"

"That's so, and yet I can expect nothing else though the Queen has all ther canvas on her that she can carry."

"Suppose we try her with the wind abeam?"

"Might do it, but it is no use."

"We'll try, anyway," and Madge gave the orders and the schooner's course was changed.

As though acting under the impulse of the same helm, the schooner changed also, and it was evident after a moment that she gained more rapidly than before.

"Better go back as we were, Miss Madge," sadly said the old captain.

The order was given, and the change threw the sloop once more in the schooner's wake.

The crew were now watching most attentively every movement of the schooner and the sloop.

They were silent, like men who were in a painful quandary, and their eyes alternately turned aft with ominous expression.

It was clear that they were under some strange spell.

Presently one of them said:

"Lads, I has allus heard it was bad luck to carry a corpse aboard ship, also a madman, a witch or a fool."

"So it are, Ben," said one.

"It's true," echoed another.

"Well, we has a fool on board this craft."

"Silly Sam?"

"Yes."

"He goes fer a durned fool in ther village."

"He is one."

"Well, it's bad luck."

"We has our bad luck."

"Yes, for yonder spook-craft is in our wake."

"And this the first v'age o' ther Queen."

"What's to be did, lads?"

"He's a fool, and bein' one is likewise a Jonah."

"What's to be done?"

"Shipmates, he must go overboard."

"So I say, and then the sloop will disappear too."

"Well, what say you?"

"I says yes."

"And so says I."

"Me, too."

"Into the sea with the fool."

"Overboard with him."

"Break the spell o' the spook craft, by throwing the fool into the sea."

Such were the various words that came from the lips of the superstitious seamen gathered in a group in the fore-castle.

They had spoken in low tones, but they meant all that they said, and were only waiting for one of their number to take the lead.

At last one said:

"And the girl too?"

"Is she a witch?"

"Never heard that ag'in' her, but she do do awful strange things."

"Better not worry her, for she seems all right, and the fool will break the spell."

"Then let's do it, for that spook craft are getting awful near."

"Who leads?"

A silence of a moment and then a brawny fellow said:

"It does, for I don't like the fool nohow, as he once licked me at the village inn, one day, when I called him crazy."

"Well, you do the talking, Buster, and we'll back you."

"Now, go!"

The large sailor named Buster, arose, tightened the belt about his waist, set his tarpaulin more firmly upon his head, took a fresh chew of tobacco, and then, with a swagger, started aft, followed by all the crew.

The boatswain and mate were below, placing some freight of a delicate kind that had been shipped at the village, and the captain stood aft near the wheel, white and nervous, so had his superstitious fears wrought upon him.

Madge still held the wheel, seemingly enjoying it, and Sam stood leaning over the taffrail, gazing at the approaching sloop, while Milmer was not far distant, deeply interested in all that was going on.

The passengers were all below, so that the deck was quiet.

"Well, men, what do you wish?" asked Captain West, as the men in a body came aft, halting near the wheel.

"Cap'n, hain't it your opinion that yonder craft are a spook sloop?" asked Buster.

"Yes, I has my doubts about her being real," was the low reply.

"You knows what brings bad luck and death to a ship and crew?"

"Yes, there are signs bad for ship and sailors."

"There is more nor signs, cap'n."

"Well?"

"It is bad luck to have a corpse aboard; it's bad luck to carry a madman, a witch, or a fool, and we has the latter."

"Now, lads, don't go against poor Sam there, for we all know him," said the captain.

"He's a fool."

"Granted."

"Then he's a bad-luck man."

"But, lads—"

"Cap'n, we don't want that sloop no nearer to us, and there's but one way to stop it, and that is to throw the fool into the sea."

"No, no, lads, you must not do that," urged the captain, while Sam, who heard all, never moved from his position, leaning over the taffrail.

"Well, cap'n, we want no quarrel with you, sir, but we has talked the matter over, and our minds is made up as one man, that the fool goes overboard."

"Come, lads, let us throw him into the sea!"

The leader stepped forward, and the crew were at once at his back, when suddenly Madge sprung before Buster, and a pistol was thrust into his face, while in ringing tones came the words:

"Fool! you are the fool, not that noble fellow, and I'll kill you to break the spell, if you don't go forward this instant."

The words seemed to hiss through the girl's white teeth, and her eyes flashed, while her hand was as firm as iron, and the pistol did not move an atom, as it looked into the face of the ringleader.

He seemed struck dumb at this sudden turn in affairs, and at her words, and looked utterly helpless to move or speak.

"Back, sir! and lose no time, or you will go into the sea with a bullet in your brain!"

With an effort the frightened fellow found his voice, and the use of his legs at the same time, for, giving a yell he turned and fled forward with the speed of a deer, his act stampeding his backers, who sped after him with equal alacrity.

A sneering laugh broke from Madcap Madge at this, while the captain, still bowed down by the same superstition that impressed his men, shook his head in an ominous way.

As for Sam, he simply turned, at the threat of the leader, as he stepped forward, and his hand sought a knife in his belt; but he smiled grimly as the crew fled.

Melmer laughed outright, while Madge said:

"Cowards! did they think we were all fools to let them carry out their murderous design? but Captain West, I believe it is the intention of the sloop to board us."

"I can do nothing, Miss Madge."

"You have fourteen men on this schooner, and I see but five yonder on the sloop."

"We can offer no resistance, for we know not what to resist," sadly said the captain, in an awed kind of way.

"You have guns there, so let Sam and Melmer load and fire them, if you care not to."

Again the captain shook his head sadly, while Melmer said:

"Miss Madge, I beg you not to fire on that craft."

"What! you too believe it a spook craft?"

"No, miss, only let us wait and see what she will do, and take my advice, miss, and don't fire on it."

"Melmer, you know more about that craft

than you will admit," said Madge in a low tone, as she gazed at the man.

But Melmer remained silent, and then Madge continued:

"Well, Captain West, I have done all I could, so let the sloop board you if so you wish."

"We can do nothing else, my child, but wait," was the low reply, and Captain West was as white as a ghost, while the mate and boatswain, who had come from below decks, and joined the crew, were listening to their story of what had occurred, and were wondering what would be the end of their being chased by a specter craft and having a fool on board.

CHAPTER X.

THE MASKED CORSAIRS.

"CAPTAIN WEST, will you resist those boarders, I again ask you?" and Madcap Madge left the wheel to Melmer and approached the old captain.

"If they were in body, I would fight them; but in spirit, Miss Madge, it is no use," said Captain West in a voice and manner that showed how thoroughly he was governed by the superstitious dread of the supernatural, which in those days pervaded all classes alike, though of course held a stronger hold upon seamen than upon others.

"Well, sir, we will have to meet the alternative, be they what they may, for the sloop gains rapidly now, and will soon overhaul us," said Madge, annoyed at the feeling of dread pervading the old captain and his crew.

Captain West smiled and remained silent; but it was a resigned smile, and so the maiden understood it, as she returned to the wheel and said to Melmer:

"It is useless, for they will not resist."

"It is better so, lady."

"Well, let me take the wheel again, and we'll wait and see what comes of it; but you know something, Melmer, I am convinced, that you will not tell me."

Melmer remained silent, and turning her gaze upon the sloop, Madge saw that she was heading so as to pass to windward, and yet close enough to spring from one deck to the other.

There were but five men visible upon her decks, and these seemed to keep within the shadow of the sails, and try as she might, Madge could not fix her glass upon the helmsman.

After all, the sloop had shown really no enmity, or a desire to shun or avoid the schooner.

Perhaps she was simply keeping on in the even tenor of her way, racing with the trim-looking packet for amusement.

The only thing about her was that she was the exact counterpart of the wrecked Blue Bell—hull, spars, sails and all, and it was this remarkable similarity, met as she was within a couple of leagues from where the sloop of skipper Vernon had gone to pieces the very night before, that had aroused the superstitious dread of the seamen.

Suddenly out upon the air broke the trumpet-like hail:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the sloop!" answered Madge, after waiting a moment for Captain West to reply, and seeing that he did not intend to do so.

"Is that the packet schooner Queen of the Kennebec?" came the query.

"It is."

"You are the one I seek, then."

"Ho, the sloop!" cried Madge.

"Ay, ay."

"What sloop is that?"

"The craft is a nameless skimmer of the sea," was the distinct response, and Captain West said:

"I told you so! just listen how sepulchral that fellow's voice sounds."

The crew of the Kennebec Queen were silent and watched, as they waited for future developments.

"Ha! you confess to being a free rover?"

"Then I warn you to keep off, or we fire on you!" cried Madge in a voice that fairly rung like steel.

"We mean your craft and crew no harm; but you have on board one whom we intend to take, along with his baggage, so give him up, and save delay, trouble and bloodshed."

"I warn you off, for we have over a dozen men here to defend the schooner," cried Madge.

A mocking laugh followed, and then came an order:

"Show yourselves, men!"

Instantly the fore-castle seemed to swarm with men, and next followed the command:

"I'll run upon your lee-quarter and make fast, while we can still keep our vessels on their course; but I must have that man, Job Jennings, for I have come to take him."

"Job Jennings! that is the name of the up-river merchant who was on deck awhile ago—ha! there they come, and as Heaven judges me, they are masked!"

It was old Captain West who uttered the words, and as he spoke the sharp bow of the sloop ran close alongside the windward quarter of the schooner, a grapnel was thrown, a dozen men sprung over the bulwarks, upon the deck of the Kennebec Queen.

Not a soul seemed to offer resistance, while

Captain West, Melmer and Sam stood gazing upon the boarders in seeming horror, though Madge still held the wheel and the two vessels held steadily upon their way.

But the strangest of all was the fact that the men who boarded wore long black robes and each carried a cutlass in his right hand, a red lantern in his left, and their faces were wholly masked from view.

"Well, Sir Masked Corsair, you have boarded the sloop with your crew, so what is your pleasure?" coolly asked Madcap Madge, still holding the wheel.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS RETRIBUTION.

"My pleasure on board of this schooner is, as I said on hailing you, to take possession of one Job Jennings, along with his baggage and merchandise."

The one who spoke was a man of commanding presence, tall, upright in form, and his voice was deep and seemed muffled in tone, coming as it did from beneath his mask.

The mask completely concealed his face, a tarpaulin was drawn down over his brows, and a long robe of black hid his form from view.

In his right hand he carried a cutlass, and in his left a red lantern, and the light of the latter was turned full upon Madcap Madge, as she faced him, one hand upon the wheel.

Behind the masked speaker stood his men, attired and equipped as he was, while in a semicircle near Madge were Captain West, Melmer and Silly Sam, with the crew of the schooner amidships, looking on with superstitious dread and wonder.

It was a strange scene, and Captain West, now realizing that he had pirates and not ghosts to deal with, felt angry with himself that he had not kept the little sloop at bay.

Still he saw that if the craft was not the Blue Bell, it was her perfect *fac-simile*.

In answer to the words of the leader of the masked crew, Madge answered:

"There is Captain West, sir, and he can tell you whether he has such a passenger on board and if he intends to give him up to you."

"It will be to his interest to do so, as it is not my intention to take aught else from his vessel."

"I will not yield, sir, to the demand of a pirate, and I regret not taking the advice of this brave girl and keeping you at bay; but your vessel is the image of the Blue Bell, a craft that has been wrecked, and I am frank to confess both my men and myself looked upon you as spooks, and now, what you are I do not know; but you seem human, and I will risk a struggle with you to protect my passengers."

Captain West was now fully aroused, and believing that he had to deal with people of the earth, he was as brave as a lion.

But the leader received his words with a light laugh, and replied:

"My dear Captain West, you will not be so rash as to resist us, for we already have foot on your vessel, we are armed, and beneath the decks of my sloop are a score more of gallant fellows, and we could make short work of you."

"I do not believe that you have more men," sullenly said the old sailor.

"Ho, lads, show yourselves to this doubting Thomas," called out the leader, and out of the hatches and the companionway of the sloop men began to pour, dressed and armed as were their masked comrades.

"Hold! return to your places, for I see that my dear old friend Captain West no longer doubts me."

Then turning to the captain he continued:

"My dear sir, you have two guns, and enough men, had you had the pluck of this girl, to have kept us off; but we are here now, and I beg you to lose no time in calling Job Jennings upon deck."

"I shall not do so, but if you want him you can call him yourself."

"Very well," and shouting down the companionway the Masked Captain said:

"Ho, on deck here, Job Jennings, for you are wanted."

"Who wants me?" came faintly up from below.

"Old friends with new faces; come, do not delay, for you are wanted upon deck."

"By whom?"

"Come and see."

"Do you mean to harm me?"

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser—come!"

"I will not."

"Then I shall send for you."

"Here, lads, four of you go below and bring that man on deck; but mind you, do not harm him, and if other passengers offer resistance, you must not use firearms, or your blades."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered one of the men, and he stepped down the companionway, followed by the three others.

"Now, captain, you will save trouble and delay by pointing out to my men here the boxes and luggage belonging to Job Jennings," and the masked leader turned to the old sailor.

"I will do nothing of the kind, sir," was the blunt reply.

"Then I must help myself—ho, Breslin!"

"Yes, sir," and a man in a mask and gown came from on board the sloop and stepped to the side of his leader.

"You know what belongs to Job Jennings?"

"I do, sir, every box and piece of baggage."

"Take four men and remove them, for you doubtless know where they were stowed."

"I saw them stowed away, sir, and can readily find them," and the man went forward, just as the other party came up the companionway with Job Jennings a prisoner.

It was the up-country merchant, the man with the sinister face, who had objected to Madcap Madge being at the wheel of the schooner.

His face was blanched with fear, and he trembled violently, as he said:

"Ah! what do you want with me, sir?"

"I will explain that to you, Job Jennings, when the proper moment arrives so to do."

"Now, take him to the sloop's cabin and guard him well."

"Mercy! don't carry me off!" cried the poor wretch.

"I show no mercy, sir, to such as you," was the stern rejoinder.

"Captain West, I implore you to protect me!" the man cried.

"If I only could! but I was a superstitious old fool, and can do nothing now."

"Lads, you had better throw me overboard as the fool, and not that poor fellow," and Captain West turned to his crew, who seemed ashamed that they had allowed themselves to get caught in such a clever trap.

"Sir, why do you take that poor wretch?" asked Madcap Madge, and she confronted the sloop's commander.

"I want him," was the stern reply.

"Has he harmed you?"

"He has, most bitterly, and he must suffer the penalty."

"Oh! sir, would you do him violence?"

"Girl, when the sloop and schooner have parted company, keep your eyes on my little craft, and you will see a sight that will show you what my retribution is."

"You would kill him?" cried Madge.

"Wait and see. Ah! here come my men with the boxes of Job Jennings, and you, lads, go into the cabin and get his baggage."

The poor trembling wretch had been borne away to the sloop's cabin, and intuitively feeling that entreaty would be wholly useless, Madcap Madge said no more, and once more resumed her place at the wheel, for Silly Sam had taken her place meanwhile.

The two vessels, the bow of the sloop lashed to the quarter of the schooner, had steadily held on their way, during this strange scene, and were gliding swiftly along.

At length all of the boxes and baggage belonging to the kidnapped passenger had been removed to the sloop, and the man Breslin so reported to his chief.

"Now, Captain West, I will take my departure, with regret at having given you such a terrible fright, and having to deprive you of a passenger and his traps; but it could not have been helped, unless you had taken the advice of that brave girl and beaten me off when you could have done so."

"I wish to Heaven I had," growled the old sailor.

"It is too late to cry over spilt milk, captain; but now I will say good-night, and to you, brave lady, I wish good luck through life," and the leader bowed low.

"Who are you, sir?" asked Madge, in a low tone.

"I am a skimmer of the sea, lady, a nameless wanderer upon blue water."

"A pirate," sneered Madge.

"So call me if you will—farewell," and the man bounded to the deck of his sloop, his voice deep and harsh as he sternly gave the order to cast loose from the schooner, and, released of her fastenings the sloop shot away, going up into the very eye of the wind until she had passed the schooner, and then, quick as a flash she was put before the wind and she shot directly across the bows of the Kennebec Queen and went flying away over the moonlit waters.

But hardly had she gone a cable's length away, when her bows again swept around, and she began to glide along to leeward, keeping level with the schooner.

For awhile all was silent on board, and then there came to the ears of those watching upon the Kennebec Queen, a wild, terrified shriek.

Then the red lanterns were formed upon the deck, and the dark forms of the three men holding them made a spectral scene.

A moment of silence, and another shriek, in the voice of a man, rung out over the waters, and suddenly up into the air, drawn by the flag halyards in the peak arose a dark object.

It was the form of a man, a red lantern swung above his head, another below his feet, so that he was distinctly revealed to those on the schooner's deck.

"My God! it is poor Job Jennings," cried Madcap Madge, as she gazed on the scene from the schooner's deck.

"Yes, and he has met his mysterious retribution at the hands of the Masked Corsair," said Madcap Madge, as she turned her face away from the weird and fearful scene.

CHAPTER XII.

A SILENT FOE.

"CAPTAIN WEST, this is a fearful scene," cried Madge, suddenly turning to the old sailor, who was deeply moved at what he saw.

"It is indeed, Miss Madge, and one I wish could be prevented."

"It would be a great feather in your cap, to take yonder pirate, sir."

"Ho! what? Ah! did you say take him, Miss Madge?" asked Captain West excitedly.

"Yes, I said it would be a good thing to capture him, and, if too late to save the life of your passenger, to bring punishment upon them for their crime in hanging him."

"By Jupiter's ghost! but your words ring like steel, miss, and it can be done, for we have our guns, and now the lads know we are not fighting a spook, they will play the very devil to get even for their fright."

Madge saw that her words had accomplished just what she intended they should, and she added:

"I think, as the sloop is so near, we could open fire with your guns, bear down upon her, firing musketry, and cripple her so that we could board her."

"Born for an admiral, you were, Miss Madge, and it shall be done, for I will get my crew together, while you manage the schooner; but no! it would not be right to have you on deck in a fight."

"I certainly should not remain in the cabin, for I have a woman's curiosity to see the fight," was the cool reply.

"Well, you command the schooner, Miss Madge, and I'll take charge of the fighters."

"Ho there forward! clear those two guns for action!"

The small six-pounders on the schooner were kept amidships, one on either broadside; but they were so mounted as to be readily run forward, or aft, and ports were pierced for them in the schooner's bows and astern.

The men seemed to understand just what their captain meant to do, and sprung to the guns with alacrity, hoping to wipe out the stain upon them.

But just then Melmer stepped forward and said:

"Captain, did you observe that the sloop was armed?"

"No; is that so?"

"Yes, sir, she carried a pivot gun on her bow, I think a twelve-pounder, though it was covered by a tarpaulin, and there was another pivot abaft her mast amidships, and a third on her stern."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do, sir, and these three guns make one more than yours, and they are double the caliber, while the crew is superior to yours."

"Well, this looks black, so I had better countermand my order to—"

"Captain West, I certainly should try to take the sloop, for your schooner is much larger, you will have the advantage of a surprise, you can cripple her, doubtless, with one or two shots, and certainly kill and wound some of her crew, which will give you every advantage."

Madcap Madge had uttered the words, and the captain again leaned toward her way of thinking, for he said:

"What have you got to say to that, my man?"

"I would advise, sir, that you do not attack the sloop."

"And why not, Melmer?" asked Madge.

"For the reasons stated, lady, the chances are against us."

"I do not believe it, and Captain West, it will be an act of daring that will make a name for you," urged Madge.

"By Jupiter! but I'll do it."

"Here, lads, get these guns lowered, and the moment I give the order to put the schooner before the wind, let the sloop have it hot and heavy, as fast as you can load and fire, while you, Miss Madge, can stand right for the craft and lay us aboard as soon as you like, and we should capture and hold her."

"I certainly think so, sir; but much depends upon crippling her with your guns, before he can return our fire or escape."

"Right you are, Miss Madge."

"And Mr. Melmer here, sir, has been an old man-o'-war gunner, so suppose you give him command of the guns."

"I'll do it, if he'll serve them; my men know little about it."

"Will you command the guns, my man?"

"Willingly, sir," and Melmer walked quickly forward, while Silly Sam said:

"I'll help you, Miss Madge."

"Thank you, I was just going to ask it; but captain, get out your arms, and call up your male passengers to aid you!"

"Yes, yes," and the captain soon had his weapons on deck, and had arranged his crew, with the addition of his passengers, as he wished them.

Three men stood at each gun, with Melmer in command of both, as he said he could fire first one and then the other, and there was that about the man that even the mate cared not to interfere with him.

"Are you ready?" called out Madge from the wheel.

"Ay, ay—all ready!" answered Melmer, and Captain West, standing with his men with musketry, upon either side, called out:

"All ready here! put her before the wind, miss, and straight for the sloop."

Instantly the bows of the schooner swept down the wind, the sheets were let fly, and she went swiftly down upon the sloop, while the guns were fired in quick succession.

But the shots flew wild; but those on the sloop were evidently taken by surprise, yet they acted promptly and silently, seemingly knowing just what to do.

The sheets were trimmed close, the bows pointed into the wind's eye, and the fleet craft rushed to windward at a pace that was remarkable, and so suddenly and skillfully that she shot by the schooner to port, and was a cable's length away before the Kennebec Queen could be brought about.

The men on the schooner seemed wholly taken aback by the promptness of the sloop's crew, and the skill with which she had been handled.

They had expected cries of alarm, some men to fall dead, others to be wounded under their fire, and the sloop's rigging and sails to be crippled.

But in an instant the well-manned craft had hauled her sheets close, and setting a flying-jib, had coolly passed to the port of the schooner, whose crew were too much amazed to spring to their sheet ropes and trim in, as Madge called out to them to do.

Anyhow, Madge put her wheel sharp a-starboard, and the sails to starboard, gibed to port as the vessel swept around in chase of the little craft.

But, ere the schooner's crew could trim taut, and get the craft down to good, steady work, the sloop was flying, rushing up into the wind in a way that kept closer by several points than could the larger vessel.

"Now open with your guns, Melmer!" cried Madge, nettled at the demoralization of the packet's crew, when all had seemed in their favor.

Melmer fired first one gun, and then the other, but the shots flew wild.

"That is not like an old navy gunner, Melmer," said Madge.

"The position is bad for good aim, miss, for we are falling off, while the sloop constantly cuts closer into the wind; but I will try again."

Again the guns were discharged, but with a like useless result.

"It is strange that he does not return the fire," said Madge, who had left Sam at the wheel and came forward.

"It is strange indeed, for he has the means, that is certain, miss," the old captain remarked.

"You had the means, captain, and failed to use them, when the sloop swept by us, for your musketry might have done considerable damage."

"Egad! the boys never thought of firing, nor did I, so sharp were the actions of the sloop—Ha! another miss," and Captain West watched the result of Melmer's last shots.

"Permit me to try, Melmer, for I certainly can do no worse," and Madge stepped forward.

But Melmer grasped her arm with iron force, and hoarsely said:

"Lady, for the love of God do you not fire these guns!"

Madge turned her head angrily, and seemed about to make some sharp retort but the words, the tone, the manner of the seaman impressed her, and she said:

"Well, I do not care to stain my hands with human life," and she turned and walked aft.

"The sloop will escape us, Miss Madge," said the captain, as she passed.

"So it seems, sir; but I suppose we have done the best we could under the circumstances."

"Ah! it is a sad sight to see that poor fellow yet dangling in mid-air against that sail, and no power to avenge him."

"It is indeed, Miss Madge."

"I hope, Captain West, you feel now that yonder sloop is not the Blue Bell's ghost, and that her crew are not spooks."

"Miss Madge, I do not know what to say, or to think, for see, they do not fire upon us, and there is something weird, uncanny and mysterious in the craft and the actions of her crew."

"If we get safely into port, Miss Madge, after what we have seen, I will be surprised."

Madge made no reply, but walked aft, a troubled look upon her face, for there was that about the weird sloop that she too could not comprehend, try how she might.

Going into the wind the sloop showed her fleetness, and pointing so close, she soon dropped the schooner far to leeward and astern, so the chase was given up and the Kennebec Queen was put away on her course once more, while Madge retired to her state-room to think over the strange scenes she had witnessed, and to ponder over the remarkable behavior of Melmer.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SAILOR AND THE LAD.

WITHOUT further adventure, the Kennebec Queen arrived in Boston harbor.

The run was a rapid one, and Captain West was proud of a new vessel; but somehow there was a restraint upon all.

Passengers and crew alike did not seem happy, and the latter felt that they had in no way distinguished themselves.

Madge went on quietly, sometimes taking a trick at the wheel, then reading, and romping with some children that were on board, and the old captain eyed her askance wondering what she thought of him.

Sam was silent, reserved, and seemed to be very thinking for one who was called a fool, while Melmer, as was his custom, appeared stern and calm.

So when the harbor of Boston appeared in view, neither passengers or crew were sorry to part company.

"Keep your eyes on the lookout for the Madcap," said Madge to Sam and Melmer, as they ran into port before a good breeze.

"We will have you on the outward run, Miss Madge," said Captain West, approaching the maiden, as the schooner drew near her pier.

"No, I think not, sir, for I have come, as I said, to take my sloop back with me."

"But you may not find her."

"I think that I shall."

"Well, good luck to you, Miss Madge, and remember, this schooner is always as free to you as though it was your father's."

Madge thanked the old captain, and soon after went ashore, seeking lodgings in an inn not far away from the water.

Sam and Melmer sought the same place, and after a rest, they took a boat and started around the harbor to look for the sloop.

As they rowed away from the dock, a man stepped out from behind a pile of freight and gazed after them.

"My! I thought they saw me and were after me; but they did not, and it's lucky I stooped down behind these boxes, for Melmer would have recognized me at a glance, as also that fool, for he is not so silly as he makes out."

"What does their coming here mean, and so soon after my arrival?"

"Why it means they are after the sloop, and I must look out, for they will have me up for stealing her, try me for mutiny, and, my reward for Brandon's capture will do me no good if I am in prison."

"But they'll not find the sloop, I am sure."

"Still, I wish the Scorpion would return, so that I could get my money, and then I'd quickly sail for Southern waters."

"Now I have kept a close watch for the coming of the Scorpion, but she is not yet in sight, and so I'll get a boat and row up to her anchorage and change it—Ah! there is a boat even now."

"Ho, the boat!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered a boy, who was at the oars, pulling slowly around the pier, and watching the man, with the evident belief that he would find in him a patron.

"I want a boat for several hours, my lad."

"I'm at your service, sir."

"It's a long pull."

"I've got a spritsail, sir, to use when the wind is right."

"All right, I'll hire your boat, so jump out and let me get in."

"I cannot let the boat go alone, sir, for my father would flog me, as it is all I have to make a living with."

"Can you keep your mouth shut as to where you go?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"Sure?"

"What my patron does, sir, is none of my business, so that he hain't a pirate."

"Ah! that is good; but I am no pirate, and I only wish to run up the river to where my sloop is at anchor, and carry her to another anchorage."

"And then return?"

"Yes, my man, unless I can hire you to do some work for me."

"Guess I can, sir."

"All right, we'll talk it over, my lad, so now give way as fast as you please."

The lad, a mere youth of fourteen he looked, pulled a good stroke and sent the light boat swiftly along until free of the shipping, and then, as he turned into the river, he set his small spritsail, and, with a fair breeze, went scudding away at a good pace.

"Do you know the harbor well, lad?" asked the man.

"Yes, sir, pretty well."

"Do you know the cutter-of-war Scorpion?"

"I do, sir."

"And her anchorage?"

"She is not in port now, sir."

"Where is she?"

"She went to sea, sir, somewhere on the Maine coast, to capture a naval officer who had been killing somebody, I heard."

"And is she expected back soon?"

"I heard she was liable to come in at any time."

"Now, my lad, I have something that will keep me on board my vessel for a short time, and I'll pay you handsomely, far more than you can earn with your boat-fees, if you'll go back to the harbor and watch for the coming of the Scorpion."

"Yes, sir."

"As soon as she comes into port you come here with all haste and take me down to her."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, here is more gold for you to show you that I mean well, and every day you work for me I'll give you half as much more."

"Ah, sir, you are too generous, for I could not earn this much in a week," said the delighted boy.

"If all goes well, I'll do far more for you, and as you are a bright fellow, and handle a boat well, I will make you a cabin-boy, some day on a fine vessel."

"You are very kind, sir," and the lad pocketed his gold.

They had now sailed some miles up the river, and the man directed the lad to head for a distant clump of trees, that sheltered the entrance to a water-way, and after entering the creek, they came in sight of a small sloop trimly built and stanch-looking.

"That is my craft," said the man.

"She's a beauty, sir, and I wish I could get one like her some time, and I mean to try."

"Yes, she's a beauty, indeed, but she's not my style, for I wish a large vessel."

"I guess the men on board are asleep, for they do not show up, or hail."

In a few moments more the boat ran alongside the sloop, and at once two sleepy-looking men came out of the little cabin.

"Men, you must keep more on the alert than you do, and not play cards all night, so as to have to sleep all day," sternly said the man who had come in the boat.

"We were napping, cap'n; but it's awful dull work lying here in the woods, and I hope the Scorpion has come," answered one of the men.

"No, she has not; but I have come up to stay with you until she does."

"And the other lads at the inn?"

"They'll stay there until wanted, while this lad will run up here the moment the vessel arrives, and take me on board."

"I'll arrange my little business then with the captain, and go ashore to get the men, and we'll set sail as soon after as we can."

"I hope it will be soon, sir."

"I hope so myself; but now, lad, you can return, and the closer you keep your tongue between your teeth the more gold you will earn, for I am on a little work here that is secret, but nothing wrong, as you may know, when I have to go on board the Scorpion."

"Yes, sir."

"The fact is, I am one of her officers, and—but I cannot tell you all, though you'll know if you decide to go with me."

"I'll ask father, sir, and be delighted to go with you."

"Thank you again, sir, and as soon as the Scorpion comes in, I'll come right here for you."

And casting off, the lad set sail once more for the harbor, arriving there just at sunset.

As he reached the pier from which he had started, he glanced down the harbor and beheld the Scorpion coming toward the city under full sail.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON BOARD THE SCORPION.

"WELL, Raymond, we are again homeward bound, for it does seem to me now as though Boston was my home."

"It does to me also, Lieutenant Maynard, and I guess Midshipman Leo Lauderdale will be glad to get back to flirt with the Boston lasses once more."

And the junior lieutenant of the Scorpion turned a sly glance at the young midshipman who stood near.

"I'm not as anxious as I was, lieutenant, for I confess it, my heart is gone entirely, and not on a Boston girl," answered the midshipman.

"Ah! you are in love with Madcap Madge, the Kennebec beauty," laughed Mayo Maynard.

"I confess it, sir, for somehow she has won my heart entire, and, if I stood in your shoes, Lieutenant Maynard, in command of a vessel, young, handsome, rich and—"

"Say, Leo, what favor do you wish to ask of me that you pour on all this flattery?" laughed the commander.

"None, sir, only if I was you I'd marry that girl; but as it is, I am a poor midshipman."

"You are a deuced handsome one, and you'll win your lieutenantcy before very long; but you are too young for her, as she is eighteen and that is about your age."

"It is."

"Calf love, Leo, and nothing else; why, you'll forget the girl before you are one day in Boston."

"Maybe, sir, but I doubt it; but why don't you marry her, sir?"

"She wouldn't have me, Leo."

"She's very beautiful, sir."

"All of that, she is perfectly bewitching, has

the refinement of a city bred lady, and the pluck of a pirate.

"Why I never saw her nerve equaled, while she can command a vessel better than I can today."

"She's educated too, for I started her on books and she got in too deep for me, for she took me over my head in learning, amused herself with me for awhile, and then landed me on the rock of ignorance with a hook in my heart, for I too am dead in love with her," said Ray Raymond.

"Then why don't you marry her?" urged Leo Lauderdale.

"She hasn't asked me to."

"Why don't you ask her, Leo?"

"Because, Lieutenant Maynard, I'd as soon walk up to the Port Admiral and ask him to exchange swords with me, as to ask an exchange of hearts with Madge the Madcap."

"Why, she'd laugh at me, and then I'd ask the bo'sen to kick me."

"No, sir, I must bear my love in secret and see some one else win the prize."

"Leo, you are really sad over it, and to be pitied; but, joking aside, she is a wonderful girl, and fully the peer, if not the superior in beauty to poor Noel Brandon's handsome sister, Joyce."

"She too is very lovely," said Raymond.

"Yes, if they are specimens, Madcap and Joyce, of Maine girls, in high and low life, I know no other part of the country that need boast of feminine beauty in comparison."

"Well, lieutenant, what about the escape of Brandon?"

"How do you mean, Raymond?"

"You do not think that you will be condemned for allowing him to go?"

"Hardly under the circumstances; but if I am I must stand it."

"It was either wreck and death, or to let him go."

"I chose the latter, for that girl loves him, I am sure, and refusal would have made her desperate."

"As it is, Brandon has gone to the bottom and thus escaped the gallows, for hang him they would most certainly have done."

"The girl lost her father's craft, and that is a good thing, for she had not her equal in speed and beauty on the coast, and if she was a smuggler, as many say, it is a good riddance, for it will be many a day before another vessel can be built like the Blue Bell."

"You are right, sir, for she was as perfect as a vessel, as Madcap Madge is as a woman."

"I studied the craft often, in port, and I hope some day to build me a yacht like her, when I leave the service and settle down to home life upon the sea-shore."

"You would do well to have such a craft for pleasure, Raymond, and I too studied her hull, spars and rig, hoping to get a model of her, for a schooner like her, say of two hundred tons, would go like the wind."

"Well, her model is in pieces now."

"Yet Skipper Vernon may have the drawings, and when next I visit this coast I shall see and ask him for them."

The officers thus conversing stood on the Scorpion's deck, and it was late in the afternoon of the day following the storm in which the vessel had run such a fearful gantlet under the guidance of Madcap Madge.

All on board had seen the Blue Bell dash to destruction, and believed those on board lost; but when Sam and Madge had been discovered on the rocks, the next morning, they had been sent after, and the schooner-of-war had gone out of the dangerous waters under the pilotage of Melmer.

Then Madge, Melmer and Sam had taken their skiff and gone ashore, where they had been met, the reader will remember by Skipper Vernon.

The Scorpion meanwhile had sailed back down the coast, until nearly sunset, and then, under easy sail, had headed homeward, or back to Boston harbor.

Night came on, and as the Scorpion cruised along some leagues off-shore, her officers discussed the happenings of the past few days, as they walked the deck, or stood in a group smoking their cigars.

Forward the men were also discussing the same subject, and it was a strange fact that where his brother officers, or those that had been, generally believed Noel Brandon the slayer of his captain and robber of his body, the sailors did not, and they so expressed themselves that he was innocent and could not be guilty.

Mayo Maynard hardly knew what to think.

He liked Brandon immensely, and had always looked upon him as the soul of honor; but with the evidence against him he could but believe him guilty, and yet, after his asseveration of innocence to him, he could not believe that he was criminal.

But the rest of the officers, though pitying Noel Brandon, conceded his guilt, and thus the matter stood.

Of course all decided that Madge Vernon had loved Noel Brandon, and therefore had risked her life for him; but it puzzled them to see how calmly she took his death, and they talked over this phase of the maiden's character again and again.

The moon at last arose, though the night was cloudy, and four bells had been struck, when suddenly a distant flash was seen, followed by the deep boom of a gun.

"Hal! a gun at sea, and in-shore from us."

"What vessel-of-war can be in these waters?" said Ray Raymond, and he hastily called Mayo Maynard on deck, for the young commander had gone into his cabin.

"It sounded like a small gun, sir, and it was yonder, not a long way off," and Ray Raymond pointed in the direction where the flash had been seen.

"I cannot understand it, for I know of no war-vessel in these waters, though one may of course have run out of Portland in chase of a smuggler—ah! there is the flash again and again."

Twice more the flashes appeared, and then, after quite a long wait the report of a gun came to their listening ears.

"I should say that those guns were six-pounders; but they were shot, that is evident, and we will crowd on sail and see what it means."

"They were fired a long way off, Lieutenant Maynard."

"Yes, Raymond, two leagues or more; but we have a good breeze, and you can dress the Scorpion up in her best, so that we will soon see what it is all about."

More sail was spread upon the Scorpion, and away she went, leaving a foaming wake behind, and heading in the direction the flashes had been seen.

On went the cutter-of-war, until two leagues had been sailed over, and no eye had detected any sail.

The reports of the guns had ceased some time before, and all eyes were on the watch to see from whence they had come.

The coast, island and reef-dotted, was miles away to the starboard, and no white sails loomed up between the cutter and the land.

Then, far away, off the port bow, a sail was sighted, and Mayo Maynard had his glass upon it in an instant.

"She is headed as we are, and is a schooner under full sail, now what was she firing at?" he said slowly, and he began to sweep the horizon seaward with his glass.

Slowly he took a view around the arc of sight, to suddenly stop and utter an exclamation of surprise.

All turned toward him with interest.

"There lies what we are looking for, off yonder on the sea, and not a mile away."

"I see nothing, sir," said Lieutenant Raymond.

"I do, but she has not a sail set," cried Leo Lauderdale the middy.

"Right, Leo, and I am glad to see your eyes are not too dimmed by weeping for the loss of of your lady love, to be able to see them."

"Yes, yonder craft saw us long ago and dropped her canvas to hide, thinking we would sight the schooner and give chase."

"But I will now see what the rascal is," and orders were given to put the Scorpion away for the strange craft.

CHAPTER XV.

CHASING A SPECTER.

THE vessel discovered lying so quietly upon the waters, and with not a stitch of canvas set, was hardly over a mile from the Scorpion, when the latter suddenly changed her course, and headed for the stranger.

The wind held good for the vessel-of-war to run down upon the stranger, and in going round to do so, all on board were occupied in the duties devolving upon them, so that momentarily no eye was upon the stranger.

The moment, however, that they did glance at the sail, a cry of surprise broke from the lips of officers and men alike, for in that instant as it were, for it seemed hardly more, the sloop had become covered with canvas.

So quickly had her sails been set, so swiftly had she glided away from where she had been lying quietly upon the waters, that it seemed like magic to those on board the Scorpion who beheld the change.

Taking his stand Mayo Maynard turned his glass long and earnestly upon the stranger.

Then he said:

"Raymond, come here."

The lieutenant stepped to his side.

"Take my glass and examine that craft closely; then tell me what you think of her."

The lieutenant took the glass, turned it upon the sail, and said:

"It is the very image of the Blue Bell."

"It is indeed, and therefore I wished you to see her; but say nothing, and I will call Leo Lauderdale, for he knows the sloop well."

"There are several others on board, sir, who know the Blue Bell, for she has so often anchored near us in port, as you know, and on the sea we have had many a race with her; but it cannot of course be the sloop of Skipper Vernon."

"Of course not; still I wish to see who thinks it resembles her, for to me the likeness was startling."

"And to me, sir, in hull, rig and sail, as I can see by the moonlight; but I will call Leo."

The middy approached at the call, and Mayo Maynard handed him the glass.

"What do you think of that little craft, Leo?" he asked, quietly.

"The Blue Bell, by Heaven!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I forgot myself, and more, the Blue Bell is in pieces; yet yonder craft is her twin sister."

"You are excused, Leo, for your exclamation, as I was almost guilty of a like expression."

"So you think yonder craft is like the Blue Bell?"

"She's her ghost, sir," was the quick response.

"Now, Leo, bring Bo'sen Vance here, for I put him on board the Blue Bell once, you remember, when she was suspected of having smuggled goods, and he had charge for some days, and even sailed in her to Portland to join us, when the sloop was released, so he should know her."

Boatswain Vance was called, and he too was given the glass, with the remark:

"Bo'sen, yonder craft I call a trim sailer, and I want your opinion as to whether you have ever seen her before?"

"I've been watchin' her from fo'ard, sir; but I can't see well with bare eyes, so I'll take a look through the peepers, sir."

The boatswain took the "peepers," as he called it, put it to his eyes, took it down, rubbed the glass carefully, and once more raised it.

Then he lowered it once more, rubbed his eyes, and, after a long look, simply said in a hoarse whisper:

"Good God!"

"Bo'sen!"

"Cap'n, does you believe in sperrets?"

"Ardent spirits, bo'sen?"

"Dunno, sir, if you calls 'em ardent, but I calls 'em spooks and specters."

"Oh! do you believe in such things, bo'sen?"

"Cap'n, I believes in what is, and yonder is the specter o' a dead craft," and the boatswain spoke most impressively.

"Why, nonsense, man."

"No, sir, it's sense, sure, for it's the ghost o' a sloop."

"What sloop?"

"The Blue Bell, sir, as we seen go to pieces in the storm only last night."

"Bo'sen, you need not speak of this to the men, as it might alarm them, and, in the moonlight, without a glass, they cannot see the sloop as well as we can, while they also do not know the Blue Bell as well."

"No, sir, they don't, and I don't want no closer acquaintance with her than we has now."

"I admit there is a startling resemblance, Vance, but of course it cannot be the Blue Bell, as we saw that craft wrecked."

"That's why it can be, sir, for it's dead vessels, like dead folks that comes back again."

"Well, we'll not discuss that, Vance, only keep quiet about your fears, and before long we will know what yonder craft is."

"I can hold my teeth shet, sir, and I will," and saluting, the boatswain went forward once more.

"Lieutenant Maynard!"

"Well, Raymond?"

"Have you observed one fact?"

"Well."

"The sloop has steadily gained on us, sir, since she started under sail."

"You are right, and she has gained considerable, and is now walking right away from us."

"Set more canvas on the Scorpion, Mr. Raymond, in fact, dress her up in all that will draw a hatful of wind, for yonder craft ought not be able to drop us as she is."

Ray Raymond hastily gave his orders, and the extra sails were quickly set, and this caused the crew to realize that the chase was dropping them, a fact they had not discovered before, or deemed possible, for the Scorpion was known to be the fleetest vessel in those seas, and when headed in chase of a craft was always wont to walk right over it.

Now, however, all saw that the sloop was further off than when discovered, and the men were surprised.

"She's walkin' away from us," said an under officer.

"She'll not do it now, that we have put the Scorpion's togs on."

"But she is," and the last remark caused every one to the more attentively regard the sloop.

"Has she set extra sail, Raymond?"

"Not that I have seen, Lieutenant Maynard."

"Yet she still gains on us."

"I believe she does, in spite of our increased canvas."

"She's a strange vessel, Raymond."

"She acts spooky, sir, in my mind."

"Don't be superstitious, Raymond, because the Scorpion has met her match and she looks like a wrecked sloop."

"I don't like things I cannot understand, sir."

"Then you don't like a woman, for where is one that man can understand?" said Mayo Maynard, with a light laugh.

"You understood Madcap Madge pretty well, when she threatened to wreck the Scorpion," and Raymond laughed.

"Egad I did, for she made herself thoroughly

understood; but the ways of the fair sex in general are past finding out, as I have found out; but see, that sloop still gains, and we have been in chase of her over an hour now, and she has dropped us half a mile."

"And I'm beginning to feel that she will glide on ahead until she will fade into mist."

"I shall try, then, what effect iron will have on a specter."

"Clear the bow guns for action, Mr. Raymond, and tell the gunner to throw two shots over the sloop."

"Yes, sir."

"And then, if she does not heave to, tell him to fire at her."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and Ray Raymond walked forward to obey his orders, though he really did not like to see the sloop fired on, as he was impressed with her specter-like appearance more than he cared to admit even to himself.

But he gave the order, and the two bow guns were cleared for action.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER FIRE.

THE old boatswain had been true to his word, and had uttered no word to his shipmates regarding the strange sloop.

But the men had seen that something was going on, and the man relieved at the wheel had gone forward and told how the captain, as they called their commander, had watched the sloop for a long time, and then called Lieutenant Raymond, next Midshipman Lauderdale, and last Boatswain Vance.

He said they all seemed to be excited about something, yet talked in low tones, and this caused the men to look more attentively at the chase.

The boatswain was asked what had been said, but replied:

"The cap'n wanted my judgment as to the stranger being a smuggler we had seen in Bosting harbor."

The crew seemed to think that the boatswain knew more than he would admit, and so a spyglass was fished out from the kit of one of the men, and each one in turn began to look at the chase, and shake their heads as they did so.

Now, the Blue Bell was known to every man on board, for Skipper Vernon's craft had been long suspected, as the reader is aware, of smuggling, but nothing could be proven against her.

She had sailed in company at sea with the Scorpion, on a number of occasions, been seen in the harbor lying at anchor near, and was thoroughly known.

But, though each man as he looked through the spyglass recalled the Blue Bell to mind, he said nothing.

Each one wished to wait until the spyglass had gone the rounds and then the verdict would be declared.

But suddenly Lieutenant Maynard came forward, and the well-disciplined crew sprung to their posts at the order:

"Clear the bow guns for action!"

The gun crews jumped to their places, the remainder of the men falling back along the bulwarks, and the gunners took their stands.

"Open on that sloop, gunner, and you follow suit, sir, but fire your shots over her," ordered the officer.

The guns were quickly loaded, sighted, and the starboard gun was fired, the port gun following quickly.

The flashes illumined the sea, the loud reports, for they were eighteens, thundered across the waters, the recoil shook the schooner, and shrieking like flying demons of the air, the round shots went on their way.

Over the sloop they passed, and entered the sea far ahead of it.

But not the slightest change was visible upon the sloop.

As before, she held on her way, and no attention was paid to the iron-mouthed hail to come to.

For a long time did Ray Raymond wait, hoping the sloop would take in some of her sail and show that she heeded the summons, but on she held as before.

Then he was forced to give the order:

"Ready there at the guns!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Aim at the sloop this time, first starboard, then port guns, and let her have it."

"Ay, ay, sir," came the answer from the gunners, and again were the guns loaded, armed and fired.

Once more the iron messengers flew through the air, one burying itself in the sea near the sloop, and the other flying wild.

Still no response from the sloop, to show she intended to come to.

"Fire again!"

A third time each gun belched forth flame, smoke and iron, and one shot flew ahead of the sloop, barely escaping hitting her, and the other plunged into the water under her stern.

"You are improving, men," said Ray Raymond, and again he waited.

But the sloop sailed on as majestically, as quietly as before.

"Give it to her again, and keep it up, for she must obey orders!" said Ray Raymond, and he wheeled on his heel and walked aft.

"Well, Raymond, your men seem to have no effect upon the sloop with their fire—oh! there go their other shots—but they, too, are misses."

"Is the sloop invulnerable, Ray?"

"It seems so, Lieutenant Maynard, for those are crack gunners; but do you see how the sloop is leading us?"

"How mean you?"

"As straight for the island where we lay at anchor last night, as she can."

"The Crescent Island, under the lee of which Madcap Madge took us?"

"Yes, sir; for there it lies, not two leagues away," and Raymond pointed to a dark line about dead ahead.

"She has gradually swung around in half a semi-circle, and we have not noticed it, the sails being trimmed as they needed it, and she now certainly is approaching the land, Raymond."

"She is, sir."

"And, if we do not cripple her, we'll run into those dangerous waters beyond Crescent Island?"

"Without a doubt."

"We can follow her into the lee of Crescent Island, for Madcap Madge taught me how to do that, on both sides of the island, and gave me a chart which she said might be useful in saving the schooner some time, when caught in a storm off the coast."

"I hope it may be, sir."

"I'll go down and study it; but I hope, if he runs under the island's lee, he'll take the further side, for that is the dangerous channel, and I do not know it from practice, only precept, and this side I'll risk running, so as to surprise and head him off."

"I am afraid that we can never surprise that craft, Lieutenant Maynard."

"Don't be superstitious, Raymond."

"But you see our shots have no effect upon her, sir, and a score have been fired."

"The gunner's aim is not true, though they do seem to come pretty close to her."

"Some of them should have hit her, sir."

"Some of them must, so keep up the firing until you hit her and bring her to, or sink her. I shall go into the cabin and look over those charts."

So saying, Mayo Maynard entered the cabin. Seating himself at the table he took from a drawer a piece of paper, upon which was skillfully drawn a chart.

"The girl is an artist, for this is excellent work she has done here," he said.

There was an island, crescent-shaped, put down, and two approaches to it from the sea, one around each end.

In these channels were figures representing the depth of water, and dots indicating shoals, with rocks and line reefs plainly marked out.

One of the channels appeared to be more difficult than the other, and putting his finger upon it, the young officer said:

"This is the one I hope the sloop will take, for then I can run in this side and surprise him at his anchorage behind the island, for he will not expect us to be able to follow."

"Yes, this channel I can run, and I will do so."

"It was kind of that strange girl to teach it to me, as she did on the way out."

"Here she has marked out the rocks beyond the island, and written:

"Under no circumstances ever attempt without a good coast pilot."

"I'll take her advice, for the rocks there, toward the Twin Islands and on toward the Devil's Caldron, fairly make me shudder to look at them."

"Well, Raymond still keeps up his firing, so the sloop still holds on."

"How foolish men are, and educated people especially, to believe in the supernatural; but so it is, and if we don't bring that sloop to a capture, every officer and man on this schooner will swear she is a phantom sloop, the ghost of the Blue Bell, and her resemblance to the wrecked craft staggers me, I confess."

"Well, I'll look over the chart once more and then go on deck."

"What a beautiful and noble wife that girl would make a man, especially a sailor, and I am half in love with her, though I confess the tender eyes of Joyce Brandon won me, too."

"But I fear she looks upon me as an enemy of her brother, though I hope not sincerely, and she treated me kindly."

"Poor girl, I feel for her, as she loved her brother most devotedly."

"Well, she will be glad to know that he escaped the yard-arm, as I am that he did."

"Some day I may meet the lovely Joyce again, and then I will try to win her."

"Now to catch that fleet little sloop—if I can," and with another look at the channel around the island, Mayo Maynard went on deck.

"Well, Ray, how goes it?" he asked, trying to accustom his eyes to the darkness after coming out of the brilliantly-lighted cabin.

"She goes yonder, sir."

"Then she has not obeyed orders?"

"It does not look so, for she holds on all the time, steadily gaining on us."

"Have you not hit her?"

"We have seemed to, but no crash of timbers was heard, no sails came down on the run, and the shots seemed to go right through her, as though she was mist."

"I see, you still lean to the belief that she is a cloud, a phantom; but wait until we run her behind the island, and then see if she don't show her colors, when we turn a broadside upon her at short range."

"You intend to follow her behind the island?"

"Yes."

"It is a risk, sir."

"I know the risk, and I know the channel; but how does she head?"

"For the further end of the island."

"Good! for I know the channel at this end."

"She is not a mile from it now."

"All right, as soon as she disappears around it, I'll head straight in for this end, and we'll run in on her at her anchorage, and just about the time she gets her anchor down, for she'll never expect us to follow her, and once we round the point we will be within a few cable-lengths from her, and if she escapes I'll buy your cigars for the year."

"It is a safe thing for me on smoking, lieutenant, for you'll not capture that craft."

"Why, Raymond, you are as lad as the ignorant sailor; but it does seem hard to hit her, so I'll go forward and try a shot or two myself," and the gallant young commander went forward and took the gunner's place at the starboard gun.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STARTLING SIGHT.

MAYO MAYNARD was noted as one of the best officers in the navy, and he had risen to the quarter-deck from a cabin boy's berth.

He came of a good family, was the heir to wealth, and yet, in a spirit of adventure, had run off in his twelfth year to sea, and had gone before the mast, been promoted to cabin boy, then got on an English vessel of war to serve as a powder monkey, and in his fifteenth year was a full-fledged sailor.

So he had gone up to coxswain, and afterward won a midship's berth in the navy for gallantry in action, when he was wounded.

Five years after leaving home, he returned a midshipman, and upon the breaking out of the war with England, had been promoted until he held the rank of lieutenant, commanding the Scorpion.

He was known as a thorough sailor, and having been one of a crew, he appreciated them as an officer should.

When therefore he walked forward and aimed the gun, the men expected to see the sloop hard hit, if hit she could be, and all anxiously awaited the result of the shot.

But the shot was not heard to strike the sloop, and where it went no one discovered.

"I'll try the other gun," said Mayo Maynard, quietly, and he carefully aimed it and touched the priming with the put-fire.

But the shot went crashing among the stunted pines upon the island, having passed entirely over the sloop.

"There's luck in odd numbers—I'll try again," he said, with a light laugh, and a third shot was fired.

"It seems to me I heard that hit a sail, or the water; but it certainly did no damage, for the sloop holds on."

"Keep up your firing, gunners, until the sloop is out of sight," and so saying, Mayo Maynard returned to the quarter-deck.

"You had no luck, sir?"

"No, Raymond."

"You think, though, that she can be hit?"

"Oh, yes, if the gun is aimed right."

"You aimed it yourself?"

"Yes, and think I hit her twice, but I'll not be sure of it, as she held on."

"Unless a vital spot is touched, you cannot see at night where your iron strikes; but if it hits the hull or masts, the crash of timbers generally reaches your ears; but I think my two shots passed through the sails, and the third missed altogether."

"Well, sir, in a few more minutes the sloop will have escaped."

"Behind the island, yes; but the moment she disappears, I shall put the schooner dead before the wind and make for this end of the island."

"It might be safer to go in the boats."

"No, I shall run the schooner in," was the determined response, and soon after the sloop disappeared.

"Cease firing!" called out Mayo Maynard, and then he gave orders to let fly the sheets and to the helmsman to put the schooner before the wind.

This was quickly done and the men wondered how their commander dared venture so near the wild shore, when there was no pilot on board.

But their wonder increased as the order came for all the men to go to quarters quietly, except those necessary to attend to the sailing of the vessel, and then Mayo Maynard took the wheel himself.

Taking out the chart drawn by Madcap

Madge, he placed it where the binnacle light fell full upon it, and, with the wheel grasped firmly in his hands, he headed for the channel.

All was breathless suspense on board, for they knew their daring commander was doing a desperate thing, in thus running the dangerous gantlet among the rocks.

But perfectly calm he stood at the wheel, issuing his orders in a voice that was resolute and full of confidence.

Rowing in to a certain point, where the rocks rose threateningly upon either side, he grasped the sails to port and brought the bows rapidly around, catching the wind over his starboard beam.

"There is a remarkably high tide to-night, Ray," he said quietly.

"How do you know, may I ask, sir?"

"Because these rocks on our starboard are nearly covered with water, when even after the storm they were visible far more than now."

"I see! and it looks that way to me, as I remember them; but you are doing splendidly."

"Thank you, and we shall have to remain here all night, in the lee of the island, for another storm is brewing."

"So it seems, sir; well, we will have a safe anchorage."

"I am not so sure of that, if the wind comes in here from the eastward, for that will make this place too hot for us."

But Mayo Maynard held on, and without a miss rounded the point, that formed the upper end of the Crescent Isle.

There, lying snug at anchor in the cove, and not half a mile distant was the sloop.

Her sails were down, and she had evidently been made shipshape for the coming storm, not expecting that the schooner could follow her there.

But almost instantly the white canvas rose over her decks, and without the slightest sound, and like a frightened bird she flew away from the shelter.

But the schooner had crept up pretty near to her now, and Mayo Maynard shouted in a voice that rung like a bugle:

"Ho that sloop!"

Not a sound came back in reply.

"Ahoy the sloop, ahoy!"

Still no reply.

"Answer, or I'll fire into you!"

But no answer came.

"Ready at the guns there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came in a chorus from the gunners.

"Starboard battery ready!—fire!"

The helm had been put down, and as the schooner swung around in response, her guns opened in a broadside.

Whether it was the ringing sound of the schooner, or the aim of the gunners was poor, certain it was that the sloop did not seem to be hit by the broadside, and flew along on her course in a silent, defiant manner that was weirdly grand.

"Give her port broadside there!" shouted Mayo Maynard, and again the schooner quivered under the shock of her broadside, and the echoes were wakened for miles around by the terrific roar of artillery.

Yet still the sloop was not checked.

"She bears a charmed life, Raymond, or she's the specter you think she is," said Mayo Maynard, in an angry voice, as he noted the failure to stop the sloop, or even to seem to hit her.

"I guess she's a specter, sir; at least I have thought so for a long time."

"Well, she's a wonder; but see! she's heading directly for the Twin Rocks."

"So she is, and she seems to lay her course for the pass between them."

"True, for Madcap Madge said a vessel could not round the lower end, and to come around the point here would bring her within pistol range of us."

"But no vessel can pass through the place where the Blue Bell was sunk last night."

"The Blue Bell did not, certainly, and now yonder craft is making for the same pass—see!"

All eyes were now bent upon the sloop, and every one knowing just where the Blue Bell had gone to pieces, and under the guidance of the famous Girl Pilot, Madcap Madge, their superstitious dread of the strange craft was greatly increased to see her making under full sail for the very same spot.

Almost unmindful of his vessel's safety, Mayo Maynard let her go on, as he watched the sloop, and then, in breathless suspense each man on board the scorpion riveted his gaze upon the craft, one and all seemed to feel was a specter.

Nearer and nearer she drew to the pass, until not a hundred yards separated her from the rocks that wrecked the Blue Bell.

Nearer and nearer!

Would she never go about?

No, she held right on, her sails still set, in spite of the increasing wind, and in another instant was in the foaming waters, in the very midst of the rocks that destroyed the Blue Bell.

But there came no crash, there was no sudden stop, no crashing of timbers, no toppling over of the mast; but silently the strange yacht went on, through the seething sea, past the foam-cov-

ered rocks, into the narrow pass between the islands, and then, still sailing upright and a mass of white canvas clouds disappeared like mist in the trees that there grew on the ends of the island.

"My God! she has passed through the very spot that wrecked the Blue Bell," cried the amazed commander of the Scorpion.

"It is the ghost of the Blue Bell, Mayo Maynard, and we have been chasing a specter," almost groaned Ray Raymond in deep agony of spirit, at the startling sight they had all witnessed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

"GREAT Heaven! Where are we going?"

"Hard! hard down your helm, hard!"

It was Mayo Maynard that spoke, and the words fairly burst from his lips in a shout.

They awoke the officers and crew from the spell that seemed to have come upon one and all.

Watching the strange sloop, they had unconsciously forgotten the schooner and their own danger.

She had held on, the helmsman awaiting orders, in chase of the sloop, and then, as the weird craft had disappeared so mysteriously, all stood spellbound gazing at the pass between the rocky island, where her white sails, like a cloud, had seemed to melt away and float among the pines that sheltered the rocks on either island.

The young commander was the first to gain his senses, and a glance around showed him that he was beyond the lines marked on the chart, where Madge had said he must not go.

So loud rung his command to the helmsman, and in obedience the good schooner swung around as upon a pivot.

But just then an inky storm-cloud obscured the moon, the rocks seemed upon every side, and in utter dismay, having momentarily lost his bearings in the darkness, Mayo Maynard gave his orders to take in sail.

This was quickly done, and not an instant too soon, for the storm was rushing down upon the devoted vessel, and but one thing could be done to save the craft and that was to anchor.

"Let go the anchors!" came the order, as the schooner's headway was being checked through being stripped of her canvas.

The anchors fell with a splash into the water, and the cables ran out some twenty fathoms.

Then the men were sent aloft to house the topmast, the sails were closely furled, the long, needle-like bowsprit was run inboard, and the schooner was ready to meet the gale, which she must ride out in a position of the direst danger.

The breaking of a cable, the dragging of the anchors and all knew that death and wreck would follow.

Forward, the superstitious sailors laid it to the specter sloop that had led them into danger, and oft the officers looked grim and doubtful, for they too had a fear that the Blue Bell's ghost had led them the chase during the night.

It was almost dawn, but with the dawn would succor come?

Would any pilot come off there, or could she come off to them in that wild anchorage?

It was a long way off to the home of Madcap Madge, and would not their guns of pleading sound to her ears like muffled thunder?

Did any pilot, or fisherman dwell upon the coast thereabout?

Brandon Hall was certainly the nearest dwelling-place, and it was over a league away, and no one was there to come to their succor.

Certainly the schooner was in a desperate situation, and from the cabin boy to the commander all knew it.

But there was no word of discontent among the men.

They believed they had been lured to their doom by a phantom, and they would accept their fate as it came.

"I will risk a gun for a pilot," suddenly said Mayo Maynard.

It was yet an hour to dawn, but the storm was coming on in fury, and what else to do he did not know.

"In twenty minutes the storm will be upon us, and no pilot could board us, while it would take him an hour or more to come off from the shore," said Ray Raymond.

"Some fishermen may dwell upon one of the islands, and it can certainly do no harm, if it does no good, to fire the gun."

"I will give the order, sir; but do you not think you could pilot us out, for you ran in so well?"

"Raymond, I ran in to a certain point all right; then, in watching the sloop I forgot all about the schooner, and blind luck, fortunate accident brought us here, a mile beyond where my knowledge extends, and far past where the chart says I must have a thorough pilot."

"Look around you, and you will see rocks on all sides, and I, nor you, nor any one else who knows not these waters, can tell whether a reef lies hidden between these rocks, or open water; so we can only depend upon the anchors."

"If they fail us, then God have mercy upon

us, and upon me for bringing you all here, for I do not shirk the responsibility, as I alone am to blame."

"But fire the gun, and see if it brings us luck."

Ray Raymond turned to obey, and as he did so, suddenly, from out on the black waters came a hail:

"Schooner ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" cried a score of anxious voices in chorus.

"Silence all!" shouted Mayo Maynard sternly, and then he hailed:

"Ahoy!"

"Ho the Scorpion ahoy!" came the voice.

"Ay, ay! who are you?"

"A pilot; for you are in deadly danger there!"

"Lads, give that noble fellow three rousing cheers!" shouted Mayo Maynard to his men, and such cheers few men ever received before, and they swept over the waters like a gale.

"Thank you, lads! I'll be with you in a minute," came the same manly voice, and then out upon the dark waters a white object was descried, and in it was a single form, and he was pulling a powerful stroke to urge the light skiff over the waves, which were now running high, and breaking in crests of snowy foam.

"Pull hard, my brave fellows, for our lives are in your hands!" cried Mayo Maynard.

"Ay, ay, sir! I'll reach you," was the answer in a voice that was calm and full of confidence.

Held by her anchors the schooner was driving her bows under like a duck, while the shock as she rose against the iron weight, made her quiver from stem to stern.

But all eyes were upon that white skiff and its daring occupant.

Nearer and nearer he came, until he was not many fathoms off.

"Ho the Scorpion!" came in his deep voice.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Mayo Maynard.

"Get your anchors in, and stand ready to set your mainsail reefed down and fore-stay-sail!"

"Ay, ay!" and the men sprang to their posts eagerly.

Merrily they ran around the capstan, and one anchor soon left the bottom.

Then the other yielded, and, just as a shout arose, telling that the daring pilot had reached the deck, the second anchor was apeak, and the schooner fell off before the wind.

"Never mind my skiff—let it go!" shouted the pilot, and with a bound he was at the wheel.

"Here! I want help, for this is no child's work!" he shouted, and Mayo Maynard sprang to his aid.

"Now every man to his post!" ordered the pilot.

As he spoke a glare of lightning spread over the sea, and Mayo Maynard cried, as he saw the face of the man revealed distinctly within two feet of his own:

"By Heaven! you are Vernon the Kennebec Skipper!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PILOT.

"I AM Skipper Vernon, sir, wholly at your service," was the calm reply of the daring man who had come out to the schooner in her moment of dire need to serve as pilot.

With the air of one who knew his own skill, and had perfect self-confidence, he took the wheel, glanced out over the dark waters, got his bearings, and sent the Scorpion on her perilous course.

"You are heading for the Crescent Isle," said Mayo Maynard.

"You are mistaken, sir, for it is not in my power to take you there on such a night, from the place I found you at anchor in."

"Were my daughter here, she could do it, for she knows these waters better than I do. I am heading for the Sunset Isle, where the schooner will ride as safe as in a mill-pond."

"I am completely turned around in my bearings," said Mayo Maynard.

"It is a most deceptive coast—there! you see Crescent Island over on our beam, to starboard, and the Twin Rocks lie off our port quarter, while that dark object dead ahead is Sunset Isle, so called from the fact that its summit is lighted up with the last rays of the setting sun, it being higher than the other isles and rocks hereabout."

"Between us and the Crescent Isle there is a perfect network of reefs, and but two channels, and how you ever got through I do not see."

The Scorpion knew her danger and steered clear," said Mayo Maynard, and he watched their course with deep interest, for dangers were thick about them.

But Skipper Vernon was a cool man at the helm, and he held on his way without hesitation, rounded the cliff-like point of Sunset Isle, and then putting his helm hard up, shot the schooner into a basin that seemed walled in, so high did the banks arise about it.

The entrance was very narrow, and the water very deep, but it was, as he had said, except for the swell, as quiet as a mill-pond.

"My dear skipper, you have saved the schooner, and the lives of myself and crew, and you have but to name your price," said Mayo May-

ward, earnestly, as he seized the hand of the pilot and drew him down into the cabin with him, motioning him to a seat at the table and calling to a steward to place brandy and refreshments before them.

"Captain Maynard, I do not serve my country's ships for gold, but from a desire to do my duty."

"There is a brand upon me that I have borne for years, that of smuggler, and yet you, and no other officer have not been able to catch me in acts of outlawry."

"Skipper, in keeping an eye upon you as I have, I have but done my duty; but I assure you I do not believe you to be a smuggler, and I owe to you and to your beautiful daughter, more than any other human beings."

"I am rich and you are poor, and most gladly would I do something for you to prove my appreciation, for otherwise you place me under a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"I prefer the debt should remain unpaid, sir, though I appreciate your generous offer."

"Skipper Vernon, you are not one whom I should expect to find commanding a coaster, for you are a man of refinement and education, and a finer lady I never met than your daughter, though she has the nerve of a man and is as reckless as a middy."

"Still, I know you are not what you seem, and wish to be friends with you, for I offer my hand in all good faith."

"And I accept it, sir, in friendship."

"Now tell me, Captain Vernon, how it is I found you to-night, or rather you found us?"

"It is easily explained, sir, for I left home this morning in my skiff, or rather yesterday morning, after my daughter's return from this vessel."

"Ah! she told you then of the loss of the Blue Bell, and also of poor Brandon's death, along with a wretched, drunken fellow who was with him?"

"Yes, sir, I heard all from her, and she went to Brandon Hall to break the news to Master Noel's parents and sister, while I came away in my skiff to see some fishermen friends."

"But you surely will allow me to replace the Blue Bell for you?"

"Not I, sir, for the craft was lost with Madge at the helm, and yet she could do nothing else than to try and run the pass between the islands as she could not round the island, and hoped against hope to run through."

"It was most daring in her; but she knew that it could not be done, did she not?"

"The pass, sir, is very peculiar, and at very rare times there is water enough there to run through, and, it being the only chance for Madge, she took it, and drove the sloop to pieces."

"And yet, Captain Vernon, I saw a vessel pass through to-night."

"The pilot shook his head incredulously."

"Indeed I did, sir."

"It must have been a phantom craft that did it, then."

Mayo Maynard started in spite of himself, and asked quickly:

"Do you believe in such things?"

"I try not to be superstitious, sir; but I have seen strange things in my life, and there are few, if any, sailors who do not believe in specter vessels."

"True; and my crew, ay, and officers, too, are ready to swear that the sloop to-night was a phantom."

"Where did you see her, sir?"

"First, tell me if there is another Blue Bell in these waters?"

"I never heard of but one Blue Bell, sir."

"Well, to-night I had headed for Boston, when we saw flashes in the distance, and heard firing."

"We stood in the direction under full sail, saw a schooner far away running southward, and beheld, lying without sail set, a mile from us, a sloop."

"We gave chase, when suddenly her sails were set, and she glided swiftly away—so swiftly, in fact, that she was dropping us, and I ordered fire opened on her."

"But all our firing did no good for us, or seemingly harm to her, though I aimed three shots myself."

"She made a kind of a semi-circle, reached these waters, and disappeared around one end of Crescent Isle, while I, with a chart your daughter gave me, came around the other end."

"We surprised her, gave her a broadside or two, and yet she sped away from us seemingly unhurt, and the result was our running into the jeopardy in which you find us."

"Yet the sloop escaped?"

"Yes: she ran through the pass between the Rock Islands."

Again the skipper shook his head.

"She certainly did, sir, and what is more, she was the exact counterpart of the Blue Bell."

"Why, Captain Maynard, the Blue Bell was lost just at that point!" eagerly cried the skipper, evidently excited.

"Yes, she struck right there."

"And went to pieces?"

"She did, utterly."

"Then—"

"Well, why do you pause?"

"You were chasing a phantom," impressively said the skipper.

"I do not wish to believe such things, sir, in this enlightened age."

"Then explain what she was, Captain Maynard."

"I cannot; but did you see nothing of the Blue Bell?"

"You mean this phantom?"

"Yes, if so you call it?"

"I told you that I started out to see some fishermen, after my daughter's return, and on my way back I landed upon the island astern of which you lay at anchor, and concluded to remain all night, and I had walked over to the seaside to have a look at the beach, when I spied you coming around Crescent Island."

"Did you see the sloop?"

"Yes; the sloop ran ahead of you up through the Twin Rocks and disappeared."

"You saw that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet you say she was a phantom?"

"It was the very appearance of the craft going there, that makes it look as though she was, for Madge is the only one I know who could have run in there, other than myself, and the sloop did look like my Blue Bell, even in the darkness."

"Well, this is remarkable."

"It is indeed, sir, and until the Scorpion were around and dropped anchor, I would not but believe that she must be a specter to go safely through those waters."

"But I recognized her, and going back for my skiff came off to you."

"And thank God you did; but can you offer no solution regarding this mysterious sloop?"

"None, sir."

"Well, Captain Vernon, let us look over the pass in the morning, and see if we can find any evidence of a wreck there."

"I am at your service, sir, and yet the bones of the Blue Bell will be all that we find."

"Doubtless; but now seek what rest you can, and after a late breakfast, I will get you to cruise around among these islands with me, and we will see just what they are."

"With pleasure, sir, if it is not too rough, for this is a bad blow to-night."

"It is indeed," and the two parted just at dawn, to seek their bunks."

After several hours they awoke, and, after a hearty breakfast went on deck to have a look about them.

The sea was as wild as possible, the heavens threatening, and Skipper Vernon advised that the Scorpion go to sea, and not remain longer in such a dangerous locality, for he had to return home, as his daughter would be most anxious regarding him.

So it was decided, and the Scorpion set sail, Skipper Vernon at the helm, and running down within a couple of leagues of his own cottage, he bade farewell to Mayo Maynard and was landed upon an island from whence he said he could row home, as he always kept a fishing-boat there.

Then the Scorpion once more headed for Boston, all on board deeply impressed with the chase and escape of the Blue Bell's double.

CHAPTER XX.

A VISITOR TO THE SCORPION.

I MUST now return to the time when the Scorpion was seen coming into Boston harbor by the boy who was waiting for her.

She ran up to her customary anchorage and let fall her mud-hook, furling her sails and put on the appearance of a vessel that had come to stay longer than a day.

"Well, my lad, you watch yonder man-of-war as though you'd like to be a sailor," and a man in sailor garb stepped up to the youth, as he was gazing at the Scorpion.

"Oh, sir, I would, only I cannot leave home."

"We don't know about that until we get an offer to tempt us; but come, are you not a harbor boat-boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then put me on board yonder schooner as soon as you can, and you shall have a double fee."

"The war-vessel?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall have a chance for a near view?"

"You will, for I guess they'll let you look around her while I am visiting the captain."

"Get in, sir," and the lad ran down the pier steps and sprung into his boat.

With a quick stroke he rowed out to the schooner, rested on his oars while the man answered the hail from the Scorpion's deck, and then ran alongside as directed.

"Here is a lad who would like a look at your vessel," the man said to the boatswain, and while the boy was invited on board the

one in sailor attire walked aft under the guidance of a middy to see the commander.

Mayo Maynard was at supper, Ray Raymond being his companion, and he looked up as the visitor entered his cabin.

"Ah! we have met before, Mr. Darrell," he said.

"We have, sir, and I have come to ask if you have captured the prisoner?"

"Noel Brandon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, we captured him."

The man's eyes fairly glittered with delight, but it seemed a revengeful joy he felt, and he said quickly:

"Then the reward of ten thousand dollars is mine?"

"On what grounds, Darrell?"

"It was I that sent you after the sloop, on board of which was the prisoner."

"My dear fellow, you told me when we were in the Kennebec, you knew just where to lay your hands upon Noel Brandon."

"I believed you, and we made a night expedition to the hut of an old Hermit Sailor, whom the villagers there call Captain Kyd."

"But Mr. Brandon was certainly not there and you departed."

"Again, when last in port you came to me with a tale about having kidnapped the prisoner and brought him here, and that you had him on board a sloop."

"I went with you, and lo! the sloop and prisoner were not there."

"But the skipper of a brig told you that another sloop had run in and the two vessels had sailed away together."

"True, and I sailed in chase, overhauling first one, and then the other of the sloops."

"And found the prisoner?"

"No, for our search on both was fruitless."

"Then he had been left in this port?"

"Oh, no, for I afterward captured him."

"Ah!"

"Yes, one of those who had him in charge turned traitor, and he was delivered over to me."

"Then I should have the reward."

"No, the other fellow says he should; but, after all, I have not got the prisoner."

"I thought you said that you had?"

"I did have, but he left the schooner."

"Escaped?"

"Well, it was the wreck of the Scorpion, or his life, so I let him go, and the vessel he was on went to pieces on a rock before our eyes, and he was lost."

"Captain Maynard, I cannot believe that Noel Brandon is dead; this was some trick."

"On whose part, sir?"

"The one who had him in charge."

"My dear man, we all saw the Blue Bell strike on the rocks and go into kindling-wood in a very few minutes."

"Ha, the Blue Bell?"

"Yes."

"Vernon's craft?"

"Yes."

"Who was in command?"

"Of the Blue Bell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Madcap Madge."

"By Heaven, I thought as much; but, did she go to pieces, too?"

"No, she escaped."

"And who else?"

"One Silly Sam."

"And were there others on the Blue Bell?"

"Yes, Mr. Brandon, and a drunkard answering to the name of Tap-room Tom—but what ails you, Darrell?"

"Have you been drinking too much, or not enough?"

The eyes of the man had seemed to start in their sockets, his face became livid, and he clutched at the air as though about to fall, while he hoarsely said:

"Tap-room Tom."

"Yes, and you seem as bad off as he is, and you should give up village rum."

"I do not drink, and I was surprised, because I heard that he was dead," and, with an effort, he controlled himself.

"Well, he is dead, I tell you, for he went down with the Blue Bell and Mr. Brandon."

"Captain Maynard, there is some trick in this."

"I cannot see wherein lies the trick, Darrell, for the sloop went to pieces, and in the morning we took off of the rocks the lady and Sam."

"Then Brandon and the drunkard were not on board the sloop?"

"They were, for Mr. Brandon was taken there just before, from this schooner."

Darrell shook his head dubiously, and then said:

"Well, Captain Maynard, you may believe that Noel Brandon is dead, but I do not, and I shall set to work to hunt him down."

"His body?"

"Yes, dead or alive I shall find him, and then I shall claim the reward."

"It is to be paid to the man, Gaspard, who delivered him to me, and he holds my receipt for it, for being set free does not cancel the reward to him."

"Now, Mr. Darke Darrell, I have been most patient under your questions, and I have but one request to make of you."

"Well, sir?"

"To go ashore as quickly as you can get there, and never to set foot on this vessel again."

"If I come with Noel Brandon, dead or alive?"

"Come with his body, dead or alive, and it will spare you, otherwise you will go into irons if you set foot on this vessel again."

"I hope you understand."

"I do, sir," and Darke Darrell bowed himself out, sprung into the waiting boat and the lad pulled him back to the pier.

"By Heaven! I do not believe that Noel Brandon is dead, or that it was Tap-room Tom that was alive."

"The latter I shot and he went overboard, and Noel Brandon evidently had some one else with him, claiming to be the drunkard."

"This is all some trick of that she-devil, Madge Vernon, to save Brandon's neck, and I believe that Lieutenant Mayo Maynard, commanding the Scorpion, is in the plot with her."

"But I'll ferret it out yet."

"Did you speak to me, sir?"

"No, lad; I was talking to myself, or rather thinking aloud—here is your fee," and springing out upon the pier, Darke Darrell strode rapidly away in the darkness.

But close upon his heels came the boy, gliding along as silently as his shadow, and he followed him until he saw him enter a sailor's tavern known as the Forecastle.

The boy then took the locality of the place we lldown in his mind, and afterward walked rapidly up the streets to another inn, which he entered; but soon after he came out and he was not alone, for two men accompanied him

CHAPTER XXI.

A CLEVER RUSE.

THE youth led the way quickly down to the pier, his two companions following closely, and there they descended the water stairs into his boat.

Seizing the oars he pulled them swiftly toward another dock, and there one of them got into a boat that they found there, while the other took the blades from the lad and sat down to pull.

Both boats then headed up the harbor, the lad seated in the stern, but though he held an oar in his hand he did not use it to steer with, but seemed engaged in whittling it with his knife.

In silence they rowed for several miles, and then the oarsmen ceased rowing and the two boats lay side by side upon the water.

A moment they lay thus, the occupants talking together in low tones, and then the man in the lad's boat got into the other one with his companion.

Then the lad took the oars and led the way.

Presently they entered the mouth of a creek, and here one boat stopped, the other pulling on.

The lad was the one who continued on up the stream, but only for a short distance, as a sloop lay there at anchor.

Leaning over the lad let one of his oars loose in the water, while he took up the one that he had been whittling on, after which he pulled slowly toward the sloop.

"Ho, the sloop!" he called out, as no one hailed him from on board.

"Ay ay," and a man stepped out upon deck.

"Cap'n, is that you?" asked the lad.

"Ho, lad, back so soon?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the Scorpion is in, sir, and I rowed out to her."

"Ah! I'll be with you at once, for we can get there before the captain retires."

"Come alongside!"

"Yes, sir."

The lad obeyed, while the man re-entered the cabin, and said:

"Now you men keep a clear head on you, and don't go to drinking, for I may want you to start at any moment, and will send back for you."

The next moment he came out and sprung into the stern of the boat, the boy having the oars.

"Now, lad, you can pull as fast as you wish."

"Soon as I get out of the creek, I will, sir," and the lad pulled a slow, even stroke.

He had gotten nearly to the mouth of the creek, when he saw, as he faced to the stern, a light, as though a lantern swung around a man's head several times.

It came from where the sloop lay at anchor and which he could not observe in the darkness.

"Now, I'll row fast, sir," he said, and he bent hard on his oars, when there came a loud snap, and he was thrown off of his seat.

"Curses! one of your oars has snapped," growled the man.

"Yes, sir, and I'll have to scull, for the wind is against us."

"No, pull back to the sloop, for we couldn't reach the Scorpion for hours sculling."

"You have an oar there, sir?"

"Yes, several pairs."

"I'm glad," and getting in the stern of the boat, the lad put the oar out and began to scull in a way that showed he understood well that peculiar means of locomotion.

For a short while the boat ran alongside of the sloop, on board of which were seated two men.

"Curses on my luck! the boy's oar broke, so get me a pair quick," said the man.

Hardly had he uttered the words, when the boy leaned forward, and a pistol in his hand was thrust into the man's face, while he said:

"Gaspard, you are my prisoner!"

"Hal! what does this mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Who are you?"

"Madcap Madge!"

"By Heaven! but I'm glad to hear that, for you are in my power, not I in yours, girl."

"Seize her, men, and don't sit there like fools, for don't you see she holds a pistol in my face?"

The two men leaned quickly forward and seized—Gaspard.

With a quick jerk, they dragged him upon deck, and in an instant he was handcuffed.

"In fury's name, what means this?" he gasped.

"It means that in the darkness you don't recognize Silly Sam and your old shipmate, Melmer," was the quick reply.

"Oh, Heaven! and my men?" groaned Gaspard.

"They were playing cards when we boarded, and they thought that you had returned until I had my pistols on them, while Sam handcuffed them, not forgetting to put the gags in their mouths."

"They were as much surprised as you are, and it was all done before you got a cable's length away, so we just signaled the Lady Madge to come back, and, by her clever ruse we have you in our power."

"Do you see, Gaspard?"

"Curses upon you, and upon the girl."

"But what is your intention regarding me?"

"The Lady Madge will decide that," answered Melmer.

"It is my intention, Gaspard, to take you back to the Kennebec, in my sloop which you stole from me," said Madge quietly.

"You wish to get my receipt for Brandon's reward and draw the money on it."

"Oh no, the Government will not have to pay that money, my fine fellow; but come, lads, put the gentleman in the cabin, along with his comrades, and we'll get out of this, for we have accomplished our purpose in coming, though I do wish to see Captain

Maynard before I leave, and I'll trouble you for that receipt, Gaspard."

"Never! you shall never have it," hissed the man.

"Sam, search him and give me the receipt, please."

Sam did as directed, and in a short while the desired paper was in the hands of Madcap Madge.

The three prisoners were then confined in the cabin of the sloop, and, with the two boats in tow the Madcap sailed out of the creek, the daring girl in her disguise as a boy at the helm.

Running down off the pier where she had obtained her boat, Madge luffed sharp and the anchor was let fall.

"Sam, you take the boats ashore, and wait on the pier until I come for you, while you, Melmer remain in charge, for I intend to make a visit on board the Scorpion."

Getting into the sloop's skiff Madge moved away from one side, as Silly Sam departed from the other with the two boats, leaving Melmer on deck in charge, the prisoners being both ironed and gagged below.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAD AND THE LIEUTENANT.

AFTER his return from his successful, and yet unsuccessful cruise, Mayo Maynard had no desire to go ashore that night, so amused himself in his cabin with a book and a cigar.

He however often became lost in deep reverie, and at last cast the book aside.

The dove-like eyes of Joyce Brandon would rise before him, and then the brilliant, fearless orbs of Madcap Madge.

"I declare they are both beautiful, very beautiful, and yet one is the perfect antithesis of the other."

"I wonder if I shall ever see either one of them again."

"What a lucky dog I would be, if I could win Joyce Brandon's love."

"As for Madcap Madge, egad, I'd be afraid of her, I think, for though wholly womanly, she is every inch a man when she makes up her mind to play a man's part."

"Now, this reward matter worries me, and although it is a large sum, I am half a mind to pay that fellow out of my own pocket, for Government will not wish to pay for a prisoner that I released afterward."

"True, the vessel and crew were saved, but the old admiral will not pay it, I am assured, and the man holds my receipt, and I must do it, and it will hit me hard just now."

So the young officer went on in his reverie, until at last a middy came into the cabin to say a person wished to see him.

"It is after ten," said Lieutenant Maynard, not caring to be disturbed.

"So I told him, sir."

"Who is he?"

"A mere lad."

"A lad? Show him in."

And into the cabin came the supposed lad.

Madge had put on a different make-up from one she had worn when she had gone on board the Scorpion, in the Kennebec, and said she was sent by "sister Madge, to act as pilot."

So Darke Darrell had not recognized her, and neither did Mayo Maynard now do so.

She had on a red wig, and her attire was an odd one.

As she entered she nodded to the officer familiarly, and said:

"Good-evening."

Maynard was aroused, and at the same time struck with the appearance of his visitor, so he said:

"Well, my boy, what brings you on board a Government vessel so late at night?"

"My boat, sir."

"Doubtless; but what is your business here?"

"To see you, sir."

"What about?"

"A man, sir."

"What man?"

"One you gave a receipt to for blood-money."

"Hal! the man Gaspard?"

"Yes, sir."

"What of him?"

"He sent me here, sir, to see you."

"Yes, to demand the money?" growled the officer.

"It is payable on demand, sir."

"You talk like a bank clerk, boy; but did he expect me to pay you that large sum?"

"No, sir."

"What did he expect?"

"To get it himself."

"When?"

"To-night, sir."

"Why did he not come for it, then?"

"He couldn't, sir."

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't let him."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you his keeper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"I've got him, sir."

"And the receipt?"

"I've got it, sir."

"Where?"

"Here, sir," and Madge handed it to the surprised officer.

"Why do you give me this?"

"Because I don't want it, sir."

"Did the man Gaspard tell you to give it to me?"

"No, sir."

"Then why do you do so?"

"He shall not have it, and I don't want it, sir; so I give it back to you."

"How did you get possession of it?"

"I took it away from him, sir."

"Boy, you are an enigma."

"Sir?"

"You are a strange one."

"Yes, sir."

"And you mean for me to keep this until Gaspard comes for his money?"

"He'll never come for it, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, this is a surprise to me, my lad; but I will keep the receipt, and in honor bound, if the man comes and demands it, or his money, he must have it."

"That is payable to bearer on demand, sir, and states that you have received from one, Gaspard, a seaman, the prisoner Noel Brandon, for which ten thousand dollars were offered as a reward."

"Yes, and you seem to have studied it well."

"Let me see it please, sir, for one moment."

Without hesitation Mayo Maynard handed it over, and the supposed lad stepped to the lamp, as though to read it the better, and suddenly rolled it up and dropped it into the chimney.

It had flared up in a flame before Maynard realized what had been done, and he sprung to his feet crying sternly:

"Boy, what have you done?"

"Burned the receipt, sir; and, as it was payable to bearer, no one can collect it now, for it is ashes, as you see, in the lamp-chimney."

"My lad, you have some strange motive in all this."

"I did not wish to see you pay blood money without the equivalent therefor, sir; and Gaspard shall never reap the fruits of his treachery."

"Ah! there is a spice of revenge in that speech against the man; but what is he to you?"

"My enemy."

"No kindred?"

"I would die by my own hand, rather than live if I was the kindred of such a man."

The young officer gazed with amazement at the pretended boy, and then said:

"Well, my lad, you have saved the Government, or myself, ten thousand dollars; but did Gaspard come to me and claim his reward, in honor bound, I would have to pay it, though he held no legal claim on me."

"He'll never come first, sir, for I shall see to it that he does not."

"Would you kill him?"

"Do I look like one who would take human life, sir?"

"No, I confess that you do not; but tell me now what I can do for you in return for your desire to serve me?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"On the Kennebec."

"Ah! and what are you doing in Boston?"

"I came here, sir, after a sloop."

"Indeed! with your father?"

"No, sir."

"What do you want with a sloop?"

"It was stolen by Gaspard from Madcap Madge of the Kennebec, and she got some men and myself to come with her and look it up."

"I see; I heard she had come here for that purpose, for I just came from the Kennebec waters, and saw her father."

"You did, sir?"

"Yes, he helped us out of a terrible scrape, which we got into through chasing a specter sloop."

"A specter sloop?" and the eyes of Madge opened, along with her mouth, in perfect wonder.

"Yes, we chased one, having found her through some shots fired, where she was lying without sail, and she led us a long race."

"Did you catch her, sir?"

"No indeed, and the men swear it was the ghost of the Blue Bell, that was lost the night before; but we followed her in among the reefs and islands, in shore of Crescent Island, and while she went through the pass between the Twin Isles, we had to drop anchor, and would have been lost, had not Skipper Vernon come out to us and acted as pilot."

"You know the skipper of course?"

"Oh, yes, sir, well; but did you say the sloop ran between the Twin Rocks?"

"Yes, the sloop or specter, whatever it was, did."

"And went to pieces?"

"Not a bit of it, but just sailed through as nicely as possible."

"My gracious!" and Madge gave a whistle.

"You know those waters, then?"

"Pretty well, sir; and Skipper Vernon came off and acted as pilot?"

"Yes."

"And is he on board now, sir?"

"No, we put him ashore on an island near his home, the next day, for he said he had a boat there to go off in; but Miss Madge got her sloop?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Gaspard, too, I judge?"

"Yes, sir, she intends to take him back for trial."

"Ah! and where is Miss Madge?"

"She sent me here, sir, with this receipt, and I'm to go now; good-night, sir," and before Mayo Maynard could detain her, she had gone.

He quickly followed her on deck, but she was already in her boat and rowing away, and soon disappeared from sight inshore.

As she stood on deck, he suddenly beheld a vessel under sail passing near.

"Raymond?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is not that the sloop Madcap we boarded and in which that fellow Gaspard brought Brandon to us?"

"Yes, sir, it certainly is."

"I thought so."

"Shall I bring her to?"

"No, let her go, for I know her errand," was the reply, and Mayo Maynard stood watching the little Madcap through his glass until she faded from sight in the dim distance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TERRIBLE SUSPICION.

WHEN Madcap Madge returned on board her sloop, having picked up Sam on the way, she gave orders to get up the anchor at once, and the little craft went down the bay before a good off-shore breeze.

"I'll keep these traps on, I guess, for this cruise," she said alluding to her attire, and when the Madcap reached open water and headed homeward, she told Sam to turn in for the night, and that she and Melmer would run the craft.

Sam obeyed in silence, and when Madcap Madge sat at the tiller, with Melmer near her, calmly smoking a cigar, she said:

"Melmer, that specter sloop that boarded us, has been seen again."

"Indeed, miss?" answered Melmer in some surprise.

"Yes."

"Who saw her, miss?"

"I was on board the Scorpion to-night."

"Yes, miss."

"She has just come into port from Kennebec waters."

"Yes, we beat her in."

"She went on a chase, Melmer."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, after that sloop."

"The one like the Blue Bell?"

"The same."

"Did she catch her?" quickly asked Melmer.

"She did not."

Melmer gave a sigh of relief, and Madge noticed it.

"Do you know the officers and crew of the Scorpion believed it to be a phantom craft?"

"No!"

"Yes, and they gave chase, and kept up a hot fire on her, but the sloop slipped away from the cutter, ran in to the northeast of Crescent Isle and dropped anchor, while Captain Maynard acted as pilot and took the Scorpion in at this end, surprised the sloop, opened on her with his broadsides, and then saw her run for the Twin Rocks, and go between them, Melmer."

"Well, that is madness, miss, and she certainly is a phantom to do that."

"One would think so; but such is about as it was told to me; but do you believe she went through the pass between the islands?"

"They say she did, miss."

"Yes, and I wrecked the Blue Bell trying to do so."

"Yes, miss, but this was the Blue Bell's shadow, you know."

"Nonsense, Melmer, for you do not believe what you say."

"Don't I, miss?"

"No, you do not, and you know it."

"What do you think she was, miss?"

"I know that she was a real craft, the exact counterpart of the Blue Bell, and did we not all see that ghosts did not command her?"

"They were a queer looking crew."

"Yes; but ghosts don't take passengers off of a craft and hang them, and take merchandise off a vessel and luggage."

"Don't they, miss?"

"Melmer, don't be a fool in trying to deceive me, for I am convinced that you know all about that sloop."

"Me, miss?"

"Yes, you, and more I can tell you, and that is: when the Scorpion ran into dangerous water and had to anchor, for a storm was pressing, my father came out to her and acted as pilot."

"The skipper, miss?"

"Yes, Skipper Vernon, my father."

"He was away from home when we left."

"I know that; but where was he?"

"He must have been down on the islands, miss?"

"What took him there?"

"I cannot tell you, miss, for he did not speak to me about the cause of his going."

"Was it not strange that he should have been right there when the Scorpion wanted a pilot?"

"It was strange, miss."

"Now, Melmer, you are a good man, and no better sailor walks a deck."

"You were true in the mutiny we had, and have been square in all your dealings, as far as I know; but you have a secret you are keeping from me, and it is in connection with my father."

"Why, miss, I certainly would not be the one your father would confide a secret to before he did to you, and I can tell you nothing that you seem to wish to have me tell you."

"If you think the skipper is hiding something from you, ask him, for I am sure he will tell you anything you should know regarding him."

Madge looked at Melmer for an instant, as though trying to exactly understand his words, and then said:

"That is the most ambiguous explanation a man ever gave, Melmer; it is equal to a woman's reasoning; but I will not press you further on this subject, and I prefer you do not mention to my father that I asked you regarding him, and we will let the matter rest where it is."

"Yes, miss; but now you had better turn in and get what rest you can, for the breeze is light, and I can manage the sloop, and you need sleep."

"I will do so, Melmer, for I have not had the rest I needed of late; but are those prisoners in the forward cabin?"

"Yes, miss, I put them there, as I knew you wanted your cabin to yourself."

"It was thoughtful of you."

"Now call me if you need me," and with a yawn Madge went below.

The cabin was in disorder, just as the kidnappers of the sloop had left it.

Cards were on the table, and a bottle or two, while it seemed close and uncomfortable.

Madge quickly threw open the bull's-eyes on the windward side, threw the bottles out into the sea, and had things to rights in short order.

Opening a door leading forward, she gazed into what seemed a second cabin, with several bunks on each side.

In three of them lay the kidnappers, and a growl came from one, as she stood in the light of the doorway:

"Girl, you shall suffer for this."

"Don't be cross, Gaspard, because you could not have everything your own way; but come here, for I wish to speak with you."

"I am ironed."

"Yes, and will continue to be; but the irons on your wrists do not prevent you from walking."

With a muttered curse the man arose and came toward her, and stepping quickly after she closed the companionway, so that Melmer could not see within.

"Sit there," she said, motioning him to a seat by the side of the door opening between the two cabins.

He sat down in silence.

"Gaspard, you used to be in my father's confidence, I believe?"

"We were shipmates."

"Yes, but he trusted you with some secrets."

"I don't know about that."

"Do you know of any craft that resembles the Blue Bell?"

She saw the start the man gave, but he answered quietly:

"I never saw her equal for speed and weatherly qualities."

"I mean do you know that there is a craft exactly like her?"

"Is there?"

"I asked you if there was?"

"I never saw her."

"But you know there is one like her?"

"I know nothing, girl."

"Perhaps you would know more if I promised you your freedom."

"I'd have to have my freedom first."

"You are afraid to go back to the Kennebec and face my father?"

"No, for he'll not harm me."

"Are you sure?"

"Wait and see."

"You intimate that he dare not."

"I am not afraid of him."

"Yet you mutinied against him, or rather against me, took a prisoner you should have protected and gave him up, and stole this sloop."

"He won't do anything with me for what I have done."

"Suppose I say he will."

"Wait and see, girl."

"Well, I will wait, and, as you will not tell me now what I wish to know, perhaps you will when your life is in danger."

The man moved uneasily upon the seat, and said:

"Well, if my life is in danger, and you can get me out of it, perhaps I can talk then."

"I will wait and see," was the cool remark, and she opened the door and motioned to him to re-enter his cabin.

"Girl, one word."

"Yes."

"I do know much, and you would do well to know it; but I shall not speak until I see that you can serve me."

"Do you hear?"

"I do."

"If my life gets threatened, and it's likely it will, then you help me, and I'll talk; good-night," and the man went to his bunk, while Madge locked the door and threw herself down, all dressed as she was, and tried to sleep.

But sleep would not come to her eyelids, and over and over again, as she tossed nervously on her bed, she murmured:

"My poor father! can I believe that you

are really different from what you appear to me?"

"God forbid that what men say of you prove true!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

HAUNTED BY MEMORY.

WHETHER it was being in sight of the ocean, which had taken her son from her, or that the memory of him haunted every room in that grand old mansion, cannot be told; but certain it is, after the tidings brought to her by Madcap Madge, that Noel Brandon had gone down in the wrecked Blue Bell, Mrs. Brandon seemed to be utterly broken down.

She would wake up at night and cry out that she saw her son, wounded and unable to help himself, struggling in the mad waters and appealing to her for help, and Doctor Brandon would arise and try to soothe her, while he too felt the pang of bitter remorse at his heart.

"Let us go away from here, husband, for the place is hateful to me," urged Mrs. Brandon, one night.

"I am willing, my dear, for somehow the place does not seem the same, and all of Joyce's cheerfulness is gone too."

"I will arrange in the morning to leave as soon as we can."

"It must be forever, for I could never come back here."

"Well, as you say; but where shall we go?"

"To Boston, for there we have a home we can move into."

"I will write to-morrow and have the tenants vacate it, and also tell my agent to send me a vessel to carry us thither, along with our baggage, for we will leave only the furniture here."

"Yes; you are so good; but why not have them send that vessel you built for a privateer just as the war ended?"

"I will, for she has been lying idle ever since."

"I will have her put in condition and sent for us."

"Will it take long, husband, for I will die if I stay here?"

"My letter will go by the morning stage, and in two days should reach Boston, so that we ought to get off within three weeks at the very furthest, and we can hardly pack up before that time."

Mrs. Brandon wept tears of joy, to feel that she was going to leave the home that was now haunted with bitter memories for her, and the next morning she commenced work in packing up.

The doctor had arisen early and dispatched his letter to his agent, and Joyce had taken it to the village to catch the stage.

Her father had told her its contents, and their decision, and she had simply said:

"You know best, father; but it is hard to leave the dear old homestead."

Away then she rode on horseback, attended by a groom, and after a long gallop dashed into the village.

She rode to the stage office, delivered her letter, for she was just in time, and then sought the Flag Ship Tavern to take breakfast and give her horse a rest, for she wished to do a little shopping.

Old Captain Buntline, the landlord, met her at the door, aided her to alight and ordered "the best breakfast that could be cooked, for Miss Brandon of Brandon Hall."

Then he said:

"I offer my sympathy, Miss Joyce, in the death of your brother, whom you know I greatly liked."

"He was wild, yes, but the oats he sowed were not tares, and I liked him greatly, and I never believed him guilty, as they said."

"I thank you, Captain Buntline, for your kind words."

"You heard then that poor Noel was dead?"

"Yes, it came to us here in the village, that he was lost at sea in a storm, washed overboard, I believe."

"Yes, and we are all to leave Brandon Hall."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, we are going to Boston to live for awhile, as mother is not very well at the Hall."

"Ah! I shall miss your sweet face coming into town now and then; but good luck to

you, Miss Joyce, wherever you may go; but here is your breakfast summons," and the gallant old landlord offered his arm and escorted the maiden into the breakfast room.

It was indeed a delicious meal, and Joyce could not but enjoy it, for her long ride had given her an appetite, and those were not the days of poor inns, kind reader, for hospitality and bounty was as general then under the tavern roof, as the private mansion.

"Miss Joyce, there is some surprising news in town," said the landlord, whom she had asked to be seated near her.

"I have the failing of my sex, Captain Buntline, and would like to know what it is."

"Well, it seems old Captain West has a new schooner, which he calls the Queen of the Kennebec, after Madcap Madge Vernon, whom he's always had a shine to, and it was her first run up, and everybody admired her, while the crew said she was the fleetest craft afloat."

"Now Madcap Madge wanted to go to Boston, they say, and she took the packet down, greatly to the old captain's delight and he kinder put her in command."

"Well, she was at the wheel the first night out, when a strange sail was sighted, and all on board swore it was the Blue Bell; but that couldn't be, for Madcap Madge said the Blue Bell had gone to pieces in the storm."

"Yet the crew got frightened, and old West, too, and they saw the sloop after them in all haste."

"Madcap, just like her, wanted to fight 'em off, but the crew said she was a ghost craft, the specter o' the Blue Bell, and she just walked up on the Kennebec Queen in fine shape, ran to windward, grappled, and a gang come aboard that wore masks and long black gowns."

"This is a remarkable story, Captain Buntline."

"It's true, Miss Joyce, for the Kennebec Queen passed up last night, and I had it all from West, the crew and the passengers."

"They said three masked fellows wanted Job Jennings, one o' the meanest men that lives, and they took him, too, along with his goods and baggage, and hung him up to the peak, and then sailed in company with the Kennebec Queen."

"Madge, she got the captain to try and capture the craft, when they see they wasn't ghosts on her, and all got ready for the work; but bless you, they didn't take her, for she went right into the wind's eye, never fired a shot back, and escaped."

"Strange."

"It was strange, miss, and old West and the crew are nigh crazy about it; but they can't do nothing, and so has to stand it."

"And Madge Vernon, what of her?"

"They left her in Bosting, Miss Joyce."

Joyce said no more, but pondered over the strange story, and then remarked:

"I would like to leave in half an hour, Captain Buntline, if you'll tell my man to have my horse ready, but now I shall go to one or two of the shops."

And Madge left the tavern, attended to her purchases, and then walked back to the Flag Ship.

As she was about to mount, who should walk up to her but Madcap Madge.

"Madge!"

"Yes, Joyce, it is I, and I am glad to see you."

"I intended riding by your house, Madge, for I just heard that terrible story of the Kennebec Queen being attacked by masked pirates."

"It is a strange story, Joyce, and a true one; but come, how would you like to sail back with me in my boat and let your servant lead your horse?"

"The very thing, for I have much to tell you, Madge."

"And I have much to tell you, and I have attended to what I came up for, which was to see the old Hermit Sailor—"

"That fearful old man?"

"He is not as bad as they call him, poor old man, and harms no one."

"They say he was a pirate, Madge."

"Yes, they say a great many unkind things, Joyce; but are you ready?"

"Yes, as soon as I tell Henry to lead my horse down to your house," and ten minutes after saw the two maidens in the skiff of Madcap Madge, which was darting merrily over the waters homeward bound.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PEARL NECKLACE.

"MADGE, what is the meaning of all this strange story?" asked Joyce Brandon, when the two girls were alone in the skiff together.

"Joyce, I wish I could explain everything to my own satisfaction, but I cannot, and it pains me to be in the midst of a mystery I cannot understand."

"Now I was on board the schooner, as the landlord told you, and strange deeds were done, and yet I was mystified."

"Tell me all you can, Madge, but first let me know if I have still reason to hope that my brother may yet appear, is in fact, not dead, for your words gave me courage?"

"Joyce, I tell you now as I did then—hope."

"More I cannot say; but you ask me to tell you about this mystery, and I will let you know all that I know."

"Your brother was betrayed, as you are aware, into the hands of Lieutenant Maynard, and Gaspard, his betrayer, went to the city to await the return of the Scorpion, so that he could get the reward."

"But the rascal had mutinied, and I was anxious to get my sloop back, so I took passage in the packet, with one of the Blue Bell's crew and Silly Sam."

"What took place on board Captain Buntline told you; but I am not a fool, and I am not superstitious, and specter ships do not deceive me any more than pretended ghosts do."

"Why old Phillis and Philip arranged a ghost party once to scare me because I would go in swimming at night."

"They told me that a great many people had been drowned in the cove where I went, and I would see their ghosts some night."

"On one occasion I could not find my bathing-suit, so I took my night-gown, and I went into the cove."

"Presently I saw on the shore two white-clad forms, and I supposed they were ghosts, so I dove down deep, came up by a rock near shore, and then rose from the waves and started toward the ghosts."

"With terrific yells they turned and fled, I after them, for their voices told me who they were."

"It seems that they did not know I had gone down to the beach, and went down, robed in sheets, to be there when I came and frighten me, so that when I rose out of the water in my night-gown, they supposed I was a ghost, and they scampered."

"Poor Phillis did not get over it for weeks."

"I was but nine years old then, and I have not changed my ideas regarding ghosts and specter-ships."

"You are a wonderful girl, Madge, for you know not fear."

"Now I do not believe in ghosts, and yet I have a great fear of death and dead people, and my old nurse filled my ears with stories I can never banish from my memory."

"But tell me, did you get your sloop?"

"I did, indeed, and the man Gaspard, too."

"The one who betrayed my brother?"

"Yes, but he did not get the reward, and never will, for I settled that; but I must tell you all about my fooling him, and also Lieutenant Maynard, when I was dressed as a boy."

"As a boy, Madge?"

"Oh, yes, for I rigged up in boy's togs, got a red-haired wig, and looked too impudent for anything."

"But I accomplished my purpose, as you shall hear," and Madcap Madge told the story of her adventures in Boston.

"And you have the man, Gaspard, here?"

"He is a prisoner on board the sloop, awaiting the return of my father."

"Your father is not at home, then?"

"No, he has been absent several days, Phillis told me yesterday, when I arrived, and that is what worries me, Joyce."

"Why should it?"

"Well, there are things I do not understand, and I intend to find out what I wish to know, for my father is as mysterious in his movements as a will-o'-the-wisp, and I don't like it."

"You don't suspect him of wrong-doing?"

"I do not know what to suspect; but I shall know; but see, we are near Vernon's Haven."

"What will your father do with that man, Madge?"

"I do not know, for I really had not thought of it, and now remember he was most anxious to have him captured— Ah! there is father on the cliff now, and he is coming down to meet us."

In a short while the skiff grounded upon the sandy beach, and, springing ashore, Madge was infolded in her father's strong arms.

Then Joyce received a warm welcome from the handsome, stern-faced man, and the three walked up toward the cottage.

"Madge, Melmer tells me you have brought a prisoner back in your sloop."

"Yes, father, three of them."

"All of them mutineers?"

"Yes, sir, they all three were on the Blue Bell."

"Ah! yes, and Melmer tells me you were chased by the ghost of the old Blue Bell."

"Nonsense, father; Melmer may tell you what he pleases, but I know what he thinks, and I am no fool to believe in any such trickery."

"You do not think it was the Blue Bell's ghost?"

"Father, I was on the Blue Bell when she went to pieces, and she is gone."

"I saw my mother die, and she is gone."

"You cannot make me believe that either the Blue Bell or my mother can come back again as they were, or in ghostly form."

The skipper looked serious, but said:

"Madge, you are a brave one, and though I say it, as should not, you have more pluck than can be found in half the men; but I have been down to Portland since I saw you, and brought you some jewelry and feminine finery that you may like."

"Perhaps Miss Joyce will accept a necklace from you as a souvenir of friendship, for there is one of pearls that would become her," and Skipper Vernon led the way into the cottage and placed before Madge a velvet case containing an assortment of rare jewelry.

"Why, father, there is a small fortune here," cried Madge, in delight, and instantly her face clouded, and she looked anxiously at her father.

"This is the necklace I referred to, Miss Joyce, and I know Madge would be glad if you would wear it," and he clasped about her neck a beautiful string of pearls.

"Yes, gladly will I give it to you, Joyce, if you will wear it and remember the donor, who, by the way, is my father, for he did not allow me the chance of presenting it to you; but wear it in remembrance of us both."

Joyce seemed overcome, for the tears came into her beautiful eyes, and she said:

"Oh, Madge, I could not accept so costly a gift."

"It's value, Miss Joyce, is not to be considered; it is meant as a souvenir only, so pray accept it."

"Why I have nothing as handsome in all my collection, and father is very generous to me."

"Still you must accept it, and let me urge that you wear it often for the sake of the donor; now do not refuse it."

"I will not, as you urge it, for I feel that the offering comes from your hearts."

"Madge, your father is indeed good to you, for what lovely things he has bought you, and these laces and silks are exquisite," and Joyce and Madge looked over the presents eagerly, and yet in the heart of the latter there was a dread, for the suspicion against her father was but deepened by the rich things he had given her.

Still she could only watch and wait.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

It was late in the afternoon when Joyce started homeward, attended by her servant, and she promised Madge that she would see her as often as possible before she left for Boston.

"I will see you when you come there, too," she added.

Watching her friend depart, Madge then put her hand upon her father's arm and led him down to the little arbor on Lookout Cliff, for she wished to have a talk with him.

"Father, do you know I have got a good

deal to talk to you about?" she said, taking a seat so that she could watch his face attentively.

"I certainly am glad to have you talk with me, Madge, for of late I have seen very little of you."

"You may think you will see too much of me now, for I am going to ask you some questions you may not like."

"I shall answer all questions that I deem it your right to know, Madge," was the calm reply.

"Now, father, is there a second Blue Bell?"

"I know of no second Blue Bell, my dear."

"Do you know of any craft that could be mistaken for her?"

"Yes."

"Where is that craft?"

"She is supposed to belong to a band of smugglers somewhere on this coast."

"Ah! perhaps that is why the Blue Bell has been mistaken for a smuggler, her likeness to a smuggler vessel."

"Yes, that is the reason, Madge."

"And yet you said nothing of this, father."

"Why should I, for it does not interest me?"

"I have certain duties to perform, and I care for no man's opinion, that is, those who dwell here and are won't to malign or praise a man as the humor takes them."

"Where is that vessel now, father?"

"On the coast doubtless, somewhere."

"Have you seen her?"

"Often."

"When did you see her last?"

"Some nights ago, when she ran into the pass between the islands."

"Father, were you on the island then?"

"No, but I was not far away and I saw her, and also, beholding the danger that the Scorpion ran into in pursuing her, I got into my skiff and went out to serve her."

"And this counterpart of the Blue Bell?"

"The smuggler?"

"Yes, father."

"She disappeared among the islands."

"Did you believe it possible for a vessel to pass through the channel of Rock Islands?"

"Not until a few days ago."

"When she did it; but you do not believe then that it was a specter craft?"

"I do not."

"Yet she passed between the Isles."

"Yes; at certain very high tides there is seven feet of water over the reef connecting the islands."

"And the Blue Bell drew five."

"Yes."

"And a vessel drawing five feet could not pass through without striking, if the sea was rough?"

"She could not."

"Father, you went away the very afternoon I started for Boston; why did you do that?"

"I had important business to attend to along the coast, Madge, and I wished to see about getting me another vessel."

"You have greatly relieved my mind, father, in telling me there is a smuggling craft answering the exact description of the Blue Bell."

"But you must not tell of it, Madge."

"Is it a secret?"

"It is, and you must not speak of it to any one."

"Oh, father!"

"Madge, you must either trust or doubt me."

"Which will you do?" the man said, sternly.

"Trust you."

"It is well; now have you any questions more to ask?"

"Yes, father."

"I am listening."

"May I ask where you got that beautiful jewelry, sir, those laces and silks?"

"I bought them."

"You must be rich, father."

"I am not so poor as people believe, my child."

"These things are worth a great deal of money, for I am woman enough to know that."

"Yes, under some circumstances they are."

"Well, father, I confess that of late I have had certain suspicions, and now I will try and set my mind at rest."

"Madge, you will only borrow trouble by not doing so, and I advise you to keep your mind at rest."

"Why, if I wished to question you closely, I'll guarantee there are some questions you would not desire to answer, and my suspicions might be aroused too, were I looking for cause to excite them."

"Father!"

"I make no charges, Madge, only think you might not be so ready and willing to answer as I have been."

"There is a secret I keep from you, I admit, and one you keep from me, and which you will not admit; but each will doubtless be known if the necessity occurs, so bide your time, as I will mine, and so let it rest for the present."

Madge was staggered, and her face showed it.

Under most circumstances she was as cool as an icicle, but now, under the words of her father, she showed considerable nervousness, and her face flushed and paled painfully.

Without appearing to notice her manner, if he saw it, Captain Vernon said:

"Now, little girl, I wish to borrow your little sloop."

"Certainly, father; but the prisoners?"

"I will take them with me."

"Father!"

"Madge, remember, you are not to question my actions."

"I know just what I am about."

"Take the sloop, father; but will you be long away?"

"No, I will return to-morrow, doubtless, and I will take Melmer with me."

"As you please, sir."

The skipper arose, drew Madge toward him and kissed her affectionately, and then went to the cottage.

In a short while he came out, and Melmer accompanied him, carrying a chest upon his shoulders.

They went down to the shore, and taking a skiff, rowed on board the sloop.

Sam was there, acting as guard to the prisoners, who were still confined in the cabin.

"Sam, you can go ashore now, and take good care of Miss Madge."

"Yes, skipper."

"I'll be back to-morrow some time."

"Yes, skipper; but the prisoners?"

"I will take them up the coast and give them over for trial, Sam."

"They ought to be hung."

"The tribunal will decide as to that; but you need not refer to our having them on board."

"No, sir."

"Will you bring them back, skipper?"

"I rather guess not."

Sam gathered his traps together and rowed ashore, while Melmer set sail and the skipper took the helm.

The wind was light, but the Madcap sailed along at an easy pace, and doubling the point, headed down the coast.

With a skill that showed his perfect knowledge of the waters, Skipper Vernon held on, not an instant hesitating in his course when darkness fell upon the scenes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT TRIBUNAL.

Creeping slowly along through the island and rock-dotted waters of the coast, the Madcap held on her way, under the shadows of night, as she had done under the glare of day, the firm hand upon her tiller never wavering, and every danger being promptly avoided.

The wind still remained light, and but a few leagues had been left astern when darkness settled upon land and sea.

The sloop had only her mainsail and jib set, carried no light, and seemed rather anxious to avoid attracting attention from any stray craft that might be about, or eye that might be watching from the shore.

Past the Twin Rocks the sloop glided, then leaving the Crescent Isle far to seaward, she ran close in under the shadows of Sunset Island, and in half an hour after headed

directly for what appeared to be a huge black rock.

But the man at the tiller knew just what he was about, and when the long bowsprit seemed about to shiver upon the rocky cliff, he put his tiller to the port, and the bows swung round, the sheet was hauled close by Melmer, and in some mysterious way the Madcap disappeared from sight.

To one out upon the sea watching her, it would have seemed that she had struck the wall of rock, and sunk instantaneously and bodily.

Forming nearly a circle, about this island was a chain of rock, an opening upon the coast side.

To enter the rocky interior of the island, the sloop had glided through the narrow neck in the reef, half-encircled the island, to its sea side, and then gone into the mysterious entrance, which opened to the right or left, with a center wall standing back some fathoms, giving it the appearance, at a short distance, of a solid cliff.

But yet there was ample space for the sloop to enter, and her headway carried her into a large basin, where there lay another vessel, also a sloop.

The place was wild-looking in the extreme, and very desolate at night.

Its shores were masses of piled-up rocks, rising to a considerable height, and the sloop and its twinkling light was a great relief to the general dreariness.

"Ho, the sloop!" suddenly hailed a deep voice from the vessel at anchor in the basin.

"The Kidnapper," was the answer of Skipper Vernon, as he held on across the basin, the light breeze barely carrying the Madcap along.

In a moment or two the Madcap ran alongside of the larger sloop, and a number of men greeted the skipper as he stepped on board.

"Well, captain, glad to see you back."

"We saw the sloop before sunset, and knew that it was you, as no other man could get in among those islands as you were doing."

"I came the outward passage, Glendon, to keep from being observed too closely by prying eyes ashore; but I have news for you."

"Yes, sir."

"I told you that my daughter went to Boston to get back her sloop?"

"Yes, sir, and the bets that she would do it are ten to one, with few takers, for we all know what Miss Madge has done."

"Here is the sloop."

"Yes, sir, she got it."

"She did."

"And Gaspard?"

"I brought him along."

"Ah! she got him, too."

"She did indeed, along with Smokey and Sands."

"And they are in the sloop?"

"Yes, bring them out, for I must start back to-night if the wind holds."

There were fully a dozen men on the sloop, and two boats lay alongside, while lights were now visible upon the shore, or rather in a chasm of the rocks.

The young sailor addressed as Glendon, went into the cabin of the Madcap, accompanied by several of his comrades, and soon they came out, bringing with them Gaspard, Sands and Smokey, the two men who had been captured with the ringleader.

The prisoners were silent, but glanced anxiously into the faces of their shipmates.

"We'll take them ashore," said the skipper, and all but one man left the schooner with them, while Melmer remained upon the Madcap at his own request.

Landing on a rocky shelf, the party entered a split, or chasm in the rocks, and soon came to an open space.

There were a number of stunted pines there about the edges, a grass plot, a spring bubbling up out of the rocks, and a cabin built of logs, with a shanty in front, to keep off both rain and snow.

A lantern hung before the cabin, and a fire of pine knots burned brightly in a niche of the rocky wall.

About the fire were a group of wild-looking men, eating a rude supper, while under the lantern sat others playing cards.

All arose and came forward, as the skipper entered, and saluting him politely, they turned their attention to the three prisoners.

"Good-evening, lads, I have come back sooner than I expected, but you see that I have brought company," said the skipper, pointing to the three prisoners.

"Now, lads, these men were captured by my daughter, and having broken the laws of our band, you know that they are liable to punishment."

"Yes, sir, that's so," cried several voices.

"Now, I have brought them here for you to sit in judgment upon them."

"Good!"

"You know that our code is such, that if a man is guilty of a crime, and he is tried, a two-thirds vote sentences or clears him, so just form a semicircle here, and we will try these men without delay."

"Some lanterns, please, Glendon, and paper, pen and ink."

A rustic table was brought, a chair for the skipper, a bench for the prisoners, and their shipmates squatted in a semicircle upon the ground.

A lantern was hung so as to throw its light upon the faces of the prisoners, and two were put upon the table, along with quill pens, paper and ink.

Taking his seat at the table, the skipper said:

"Men, are you ready for this trial?"

"We are," came in a deep chorus from twenty men.

"You know, in forming this secret band, I was most particular to get men whom I could fully trust, and I selected only those whom I believed true as steel, for our lives and much else depended upon ourselves."

"We were all bound by certain oaths, which we took with our eyes open, and knowing the penalty of breaking."

"Did you not?"

"We did," came in the same deep chorus.

"Of late I have observed that some of the members of the League were not acting just right."

"They were a little lax when not under my eye, and when lying hidden on the Blue Bell, in my harbor, they got on a carousal one night."

"Gaspard, the prisoner here, was the leader of the others, and the two fellow-prisoners with him, were on the sloop then."

"You know how my daughter sought the aid of the crew to capture an officer, accused of certain crimes, who, for the reward offered for him, had been kidnapped."

"Believing this officer innocent, pitying him because he was wounded and helpless, my daughter was anxious to set him free that he might prove his innocence."

"But he was kidnapped and taken to Boston, Madcap Madge following in the Blue Bell and getting possession of him and her sloop."

"Now you know what followed."

"We do."

"Gaspard, in command of the sloop Madcap on her return, hatched up a plot to get that reward."

"He started a mutiny, attacked my daughter and her allies, took the prisoner, caused blood to be shed in doing so, and sold the officer to the Government."

"Then he ran off with the sloop, and took it to Boston, there to await until he got his blood-money, when it was his intention to turn pirate."

"Now, you have all made money while with me, for there are certain perquisites you are allowed, and I venture to say all of you have a snug sum laid by."

"We have done well, and we have clung close together; but one link in the chain being broken, the rest of it will be useless, hence we must rivet the chain together once more, by making an example of the traitors."

"Men, you know of what they are guilty, and it remains for you to say whether they shall be punished."

"What say you?"

"Punish them!"

The words were deep and full of meaning, and the three prisoners quailed under the anger of their comrades.

"What shall be their punishment, men?"

A moment of silence, and then one voice said:

"Death!"

"You have heard, so now take a ballot to see if there be a two-third vote."

"Glendon, give out the ballots."

Bits of paper were given to each man, and

then they were told to step up to the table and write "yes" or "no," and throw the slip in a box that was there.

This each man did, and not a word broke the silence of the impressive scene.

At last all had voted, excepting the officers, Captain Vernon and Mate Glendon, and the votes were counted by the former.

"Men, there is not a vote here that is not in favor of the death of the prisoners.

The three men groaned, while Gaspard said.

"You will not dare to murder us."

"This is not murder, Gaspard, as you know, for this League has its laws and must be governed by them.

"You are guilty and you must die," said Skipper Vernon, sternly.

"You will not kill us?"

"My poor man, I beg you to spend your breath in prayer, for you are to die, and within the hour, for so your doom is pronounced."

The skipper then turned to the silent circle of men and continued:

"Men, there are eighteen of you, I see.

"Six of you are to be the executioners of each man, and three of your weapons are to be loaded and three unloaded, so that you will not know whether you fire the fatal shot or not.

"You are to be cool, take perfect aim, and fire at the word when I give it."

"Glendon, you load the muskets and form the men in line."

The guns were then loaded, half with bullets, half with powder only, and the men came up in twos and took them.

Then the prisoners were placed with their backs against the rocky wall, their piteous pleading for life enough to melt a stone, yet received in stern, grim silence by all whom they had wronged.

In front of each doomed man stood six executioners, and all were ready for the word.

"Skipper Vernon, for God's sake give us another chance," cried Gaspard.

"Your sentence has been passed."

"Well, you'll regret this, for I have written out everything for your daughter, and if we go not back, she will know all; but if you pardon me and let me go my way, I will never reveal the secret."

Skipper Vernon's face grew black at the man's confession that he had written a statement to Madge, of the secrets of the League, and in a voice of thunder he shouted:

"Ay, you beg for your life, but would see your two comrades shot, while you have struck at me after death, as you think, by writing to my daughter.

"But see, you paid Silly Sam well to have him deliver this package to Madcap Madge, and he gave it to me, so you are thwarted in your last act of devilry, while, what you have written here is a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and so is this second package, which you wrote to the commander of the Scorpion, telling him how to find Vernon's Smuggler Retreat.

"You are foiled, Gaspard, and the gold you have hoarded goes to your shipmates here!

"Men, are you ready?"

The wretched traitor groaned and dropped his head upon his breast.

"Ready!" said the eighteen executioners, as one man.

"Aim at the heart—fire!"

The muskets flashed together, and the reports commingled resounded like a piece of artillery, while the three traitors fell dead in their tracks.

"Glendon, on board the sloop I found the money of Gaspard, which he had been hoarding up in Boston.

"It amounts to a snug sum for each of the band, so divide it.

"Now I must return, for I see there is a fair breeze springing up; but expect to hear from me soon.

"Good-night, my comrades," and the strange man walked away, rowed out to the sloop and said:

"We will sail now, Melmer."

"Yes, sir; for we have a good breeze; but is all over?"

"Yes, all is over, and you are second mate of the League in Gaspard's place."

"I thank you, sir; I shall endeavor to deserve the promotion," and as Melmer spoke

the little Madcap swung away from the large sloop, the freshening breeze filled her sails, and she glided out of the secret basin in the island rendezvous of this mysterious band of men.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PRIVATEER SCHOONER.

IN a shipping office in the city of Boston, a man of middle age, wearing spectacles, and with the shrewd face of one who meant business in all his transactions, was seated, engaged in reading a letter that seemed to contain considerable interest for him.

He pursed up his lips, rubbed his spectacles, and muttered to himself several times.

Just then a clerk came in from the outer office, a man who looked to be the very one for such an employer.

"Vezey, I have a letter here from Doctor Brandon."

"Yes, sir, I recognized his superscription."

"Doubtless; but he is coming to Boston."

"Yes, sir."

"Not for a week, but to live."

"No, sir."

"I say yes, Vezey."

"Yes, sir."

"He wishes to have the tenant at once notified to leave the Milk street residence, and have it put in perfect repair."

"But will the tenant vacate, sir?"

"Will your grandmother take snuff, Vezey? He *must* leave, for Brandon says so, and we are to give him his rent free, as an inducement, for the time he has had the house."

"I think I can arrange that, sir."

"Yes, I guess you can, with a bonus on our side of the ledger."

"Yes, sir; but when does he come?"

"Within three weeks."

"This move is sudden."

"Yes, but his son's acts, and death have broken up his mother's health, and they all want a change."

"Yes, sir; and Miss Joyce is coming too?"

"Of course, but you hav'n't any show there, Vezey, for she refused me a year ago, and you are certainly worse than I am in every respect."

"Yes, Mr. Bentley," and Vezey smirked.

"But that is not all, sir."

"No, sir, you are rich, and I but a poor clerk."

"I was not thinking of my riches and your poverty, Vezey, but there is another thing."

"Yes, sir."

"You remember the schooner that Brandon had built for a privateer, intending to arm and equip her, and then present her to his son as a privateer?"

"Yes, sir."

"The war ended and spoiled that game, and there the schooner has laid ever since."

"Yes, sir."

"He wrote me to sell her, some weeks ago, and now he says I am to ship a crew for her and send her on after his luggage and family."

"He says the packet schooner would not run into the little harbor near his home, and he would have to haul his things many miles to the village, and so he will use the schooner."

"A good idea, sir."

"And then he says he will sell her as she will be in condition."

"Yes, sir."

"Now he is to have a pilot there ready to go off to her and run her in, when she arrives and signals, and he wants her at once put in condition, and made comfortable."

"Yes, sir."

"I will go down now and take a look at her, see what is to be done to make her comfortable, and look up a skipper and crew, while you go and see the tenant in the Milk street mansion."

"I will go at once, sir," and Vezey departed, and left his employer lost in reverie.

The thoughts of the shipping merchant ran as follows:

"Now Vezey ought to save us a hundred on the Milk street house, and he'll get an extra ten for himself, the sly dog."

"Then I should make a couple of hundred in getting the schooner ready, and a five off the crew each, and something from the captain, so I'll then get back my losses of last

week on that cargo of sugar; oh! here is a customer, and a stranger," and Mr. Bentley turned to the door as a gentleman was ushered into his private office.

He was a man dressed in the height of fashion, with something the look of a fast man about town, and he wore spectacles.

"Mr. Bentley, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, Jacob Bentley, the senior partner of the firm of Bentley & Co., shipping merchants, sir, and wholly at your service; what might I call your name, sir?"

"My name is Kennard, sir, and I am a sailor in search of a vessel."

"Ah! but you look like a—" the old man caught himself, for he was about to say city dandy, but said instead—"a city-bred gentleman, sir."

"Looks are often deceiving, sir, as you have doubtless found out."

"I have, especially in your case, sir."

"Now, Mr. Bentley, I am, as I said, a sailor, and I wish a vessel for the Southern trade, so she must be fast and stanch, and yet be able to carry well."

"I see, sir."

"A brig I have, that—"

"No, I wish a schooner, and I was told you had one laid up, that you might part with."

"The schooner is not mine, sir, but belongs to one of my patrons, sir, and was built for privateering, but came out too late."

"I have just had a letter from her owner, asking me to send her to him to bring his family and furniture here, from his home on the coast of Maine."

"Indeed! that will prevent my getting the vessel."

"Well, sir, she has to be fitted up first, and a crew put on her; but after the doctor arrives she will be for sale."

"Who did you say owned her?"

"Doctor Brandon."

"Indeed! of Brandon Hall? An old friend of mine, who has the grandest home in the Kennebec country; but I had not heard of his intention to leave."

"Yes, he is coming here bag and baggage, for the wickedness of his son has broken up his mother's health."

"There is a great deal of wickedness in this sinful world, Mr. Kennard," and Jacob Bentley sighed dismally.

"There is indeed, sir; but if you have not engaged a skipper and crew, sir, I would like to offer myself and men, for I have a dozen fine fellows here under pay, and doing no work for it."

"That is bad; but are you able to give references, sir, as to your ability as a skipper?"

"My dear Mr. Bentley, I can bring you any number of references; but come, I will buy the schooner, after a trial trip, if she suits me, and pay you cash for her."

"Now, you go along, and let her trial trip be up to the Kennebec and back, and I'll charge nothing for my services or my crew."

Jacob Bentley saw here a chance to make considerable money, so he said:

"I cannot go myself, sir; but if you are willing to take the schooner up there and back for nothing, you can do so; but of course I do not wish it known that I allowed her to go without recompense, as other sailing-masters and seamen would not like it, as it would throw them out of a job."

"I see, sir, and I will give you a receipt in full for one month's pay for myself and ten men."

Jacob Bentley was delighted, and his mind ran:

"Ten seamen at twenty dollars each, two hundred, and seventy dollars for a skipper, making two hundred and seventy dollars Brandon will have to pay me."

"I am driving a good bargain, but must make other perquisites in this matter."

Then he said aloud:

"Captain Kennard, I am going over to have a look at the vessel, and you can accompany me."

So the two went together, and the skipper was delighted with the craft, and suggested a number of additional improvements.

"All these cost money, sir, and only for a short run would not pay."

"Yes, but I am sure of buying her, and will give you a deposit of a thousand dollars on her, if you will make the additions I ask,

and you can add their price to the value of the schooner when I buy her."

This was satisfactory, the money down was paid, old Bentley dined with the skipper at the best inn in town, and went home half-drunk voting him the best man that had ever sailed on salt water, or might sail on it.

"I'll charge all the improvements in the bill Brandon must pay, as absolutely necessary, and get the thousand dollars clear; but I'll make the builder pay me a liberal percentage too, and Brandon must give me my commission for selling the craft."

"I am doing well surely, but I won't let Vezey into the secret, as I would have to give him something for fear he may talk! Ah, Vezey, how have you arranged it about the tenant on Milk street?" he asked as he saw that worthy awaiting him at the door of his house.

"I had to give him back the six months' rent, sir, to move, but he handed me back a hundred dollars, sir."

"I see; well, Vezey, put half of that to my credit, and keep the balance, for you are a good fellow, and have done well."

"Come in and have some tea, Vezey?"

"No, thank you, I must hurry away to class meeting," and Vezey walked away, his hand fumbling the three months' rent he had in his pocket, for he had told just half the truth, the tenant demanding only the expenses of moving.

And into his comfortable home went merchant Bentley, and, putting on a weary look scolded the children for making a noise, let his wife wait on him, refused to give her a new shawl, and after having family prayers retired to bed to get rid of his guilty conscience if he could.

The following morning men were set to work overhauling the schooner, and the tenant on Milk street moved out, so that Vezey put carpenters and painters in the house to repair it.

Thus ten days passed away, and with correct clearance papers, the schooner sailed out of Boston harbor astern of the packet Kennebec Queen, and walking her deck was Skipper Kennard, now attired in a sailor suit, and wearing a triumphant smile upon his face, as he called out to his mate:

"Talbot, yonder craft is considered as fast as any in these waters, and we are picking her up rapidly."

"She is bound for the Kennebec, and now we have a chance to see just what this schooner will do," and the captain watched the race with deepest interest, for old captain West, seeing a fleet craft astern of his Queen of the Kennebec, was determined to show him a clean pair of heels.

But to the great mortification of the Kennebec captain, when dawn broke he was sailing in the wake of the strange schooner, and with his most powerful glass was trying to decipher the name upon her stern.

"It looks to me like Moonshine," he said to his mate.

"It is Moonbeam, sir, and that is the name of the schooner Doctor Brandon had built over a year ago for a privateer, and that's the craft," answered the mate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION.

SHORTLY after the sloop Madcap sailed out of Vernon's Haven, with the skipper himself at the helm, and the prisoners below, with Melmer lolling upon the deck forward, Madcap Madge went down to the cliff lookout and watched her attentively.

The maiden saw that the wind was light, and observed that the sloop rounded the point and headed along the coast.

"I cannot help it, but I must satisfy myself upon this matter," she muttered.

A moment after she added:

"And I will!"

Going to the cottage, she called Sam.

"I am here, Miss Madge."

"Sam, did you prepare those things I asked you to get together?"

"Yes, Miss Madge, they are all together."

"Can you carry them on horseback?"

"Yes, miss; I guess so."

"Well, tie them up firmly, and I will have Philip get the horses, and you come with me."

Silly Sam wondered, but without a word obeyed.

Soon after, mounted upon the two shaggy

ponies belonging to the skipper, Madge and Sam rode away from the cottage.

They went along at a lope, Madge leading the way, and just at sunset came out upon the brow of a hill overlooking the sea.

The had passed Brandon Hall, going around it at a safe distance, and it was now in view upon their right, while before them stretched the ocean, with innumerable rocks, reefs and islands near the coast.

Glancing down from their lookout, Madge pointed to a white sail a league distant, and said:

"Sam, there is the sloop."

"Yes, miss."

"And the hut of the Brandon Hall fisherman lies yonder on the shore of that cove."

"Yes, Miss Madge."

"Well, we must go there, as soon as we see just what course the sloop is taking."

"I should say it was toward Sunset Rock."

"So it is, so to Sunset Rock we will go."

Down the hill she led the way, and just at dark arrived at a small log hut, built under the shelter of an overhanging cliff, and near the beach of a small cove, or inlet.

The door was open and a fire within sent out a cheery light, while there was the scent of frying fish in the air.

"Ho, Boston!" called out Madge, and in response a grizzly-faced, weatherbeaten man came to the door.

"It is Madge Vernon, Boston, and Silly Sam is with me."

"Yes, I knows you now," said the man.

"My father has gone down the coast, Boston, in my little sloop, and I wish to go off with this bundle Sam carries, so rode here to head him off and ask you to let me have your boat, while you look after our horses until our return."

"Here is the boat, girl, and you can hitch the horses to those saplings, and I'll see they don't leave you."

"Thank you, Boston; and give this gold to your wife up at the Hall, to buy something with."

Boston's eyes glittered as he saw the gold, and he took it quickly, with the remark:

"Thankee, girl; they do say your father gets his gold by smuggling, but I never sees nothing wrong in these waters, and if he got it by piratin', it's good all the same, and I thank ye for it."

"I'll get the boat ready for yer, and fetch out the sail, too, for yer is likely to have a wind running back."

"I seen ther sloop standin' down the coast, but didn't know whar it was going."

"Yer father don't want a hand on his sloop, does he, for I won't have no more fishin' to do for the Hall folks arter next week?"

"I'll speak to him about you, Boston," was the reply, and getting into the boat, Madge took her seat in the stern.

"Want me to row yer out?"

"No, thank you, Boston, Sam will row," and Sam took up the oars and sent the boat quickly away from the shore.

Taking the little tiller, Madge steered, and after a row of nearly a league, they came to Sunset Rock, and with a perfect knowledge of the locality, the maiden ran close in to the side of a jutting rock.

"Leap ashore, Sam, and hold the painter, until I muffle these oars," she said.

Sam obeyed, and with pieces of sail the oars were muffled securely.

"Now, Sam, go up to that rock and see if you can discover the sloop."

Sam was gone out several minutes, when he returned with the information that the Madcap had just passed upon the other side of the island.

"Good! now I'll keep her in sight, and you, Sam, take your bundle and await me here."

"I understand, Miss Madge," was the answer, and Sam shoved the boat off, and taking the oars, the maiden pulled swiftly away, rounding the island and following in the wake of the sloop.

In a little while she looked around and saw the sloop not very far ahead.

"It is lucky there is so little wind, or I could not have found her," she said, and with slow stroke she kept on her way.

After awhile she laid on her oars, and watched the sloop.

She saw her head straight for the rocky wall of the island and disappear.

"Ah! she has gone in there, and I believed I was the only one who knew that secret basin."

"It is lucky I did not select that place; but here goes to find out this secret."

Resuming her oars again, she pulled straight into the channel taken by the sloop, and running alongside of a rock, she made her boat fast.

Then she climbed to the top of the rocky wall and saw the two sloops lying side by side in the basin.

As stealthily as a tiger she crept around the ridge, and at last came to where she could look over into the chasm.

As she did so there came a crash of musketry, and a shriek very nearly escaped her lips; but looking over, she beheld the three traitors lying dead, a number of men with muskets in their hands, her father and with him a young man with a tall upright form.

"I have seen enough," she muttered, and hastily she retraced her way to the boat, rowing out of the channel just as she heard them raising sail on the sloop.

Exerting her entire strength she bent to her oars, and the boat cut through the water at a tremendous pace.

"Ho, Sam!" she cried as she neared the rock where she had left him.

"Here I am!" was the reply.

"Get in quickly, for the sloop has wind now and is coming back."

Sam obeyed, and hastily stepped the little mast and raised sail.

Away went the skiff, while Sam asked:

"Did you not hear the report of a heavy gun, awhile since, Miss Madge?"

"Yes, I heard the report; but we must hasten, Sam, so you take the oars."

Without a word Sam obeyed, and the skiff fairly bounded over the waters on her way back to the fisherman's home.

At length she ran into the little cove, Boston met them at the beach, and asked:

"Did you catch the sloop, miss?"

"Yes, I saw her," was the quick reply, and mounting hastily the two rode away at a gallop.

"Sam!"

"Yes, Miss Madge."

"We must reach home before father does."

"It is a hard ride, miss, and the breeze is freshening."

"Still we must make it, so do not spare the whip."

Thus the rugged ponies were urged on through the forests and vales, over hill and across meadows, until at last they dashed along the ridge on the point of which was the Vernon cottage.

Panting with their effort the ponies drew up at the stable, glad their hard race was at an end, and while Sam looked to their comfort, Madge hastily ran down to the lookout and gazed out upon the sea.

There was the sloop skimming swiftly along, and almost at the entrance to the little haven.

"All right," said Madge, grimly, and hastening back to the cottage, she was soon in bed.

Sam came in soon after, and went to his room, and she breathed more easily, and then Skipper Vernon arrived and softly entered his chamber, which adjoined that of Madge.

"Back again, father?" called out Madge, innocently.

"Yes, my child, sooner than I expected I would be; but the wind freshened; good-night," and skipper Vernon retired for the night, little dreaming that his steps had been dogged by his daring daughter.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRANGE SKIPPER.

It was very gratifying to Captain Kennard, as he stood upon the deck of the schooner he was desirous of purchasing, and beheld her overhaul, walk past and drop astern the fleet Queen of the Kennebec.

He had heard Captain West's new schooner spoken of as a wonder for sailing fast, and her record in her trips made could not be questioned.

She had been under full sail going down the harbor, before the Moonbeam had gotten up her anchor, and, anxious to show his vessel off, the Yankee skipper had clothed her in topsails and all sail that would draw.

"There goes the Queen of the Kennebec!"

"If you were only ready to have a brush with her, you could tell what your schooner could do," cried Jacob Bentley, who stood on the deck of the Moonbeam talking to the skipper.

The captain cast an eye down the harbor, saw the Yankee craft flying away, and gave orders to get up anchor and set sail.

Mr. Bentley was hastily set ashore with a fervent.

"God bless you! may you win the race," and the schooner went dashing after the packet.

There was everything in favor of the Kennebec Queen, for she was old enough to have settled down to business; but on the Moonbeam everything was new, the sails had not been stretched, the rigging did not set taut, her crew were not accustomed to her, and all was against her.

But the way she picked up and dropped the Queen of the Kennebec delighted her skipper and they grew hilarious over their triumph.

Having shown her qualities at sailing with the wind abeam, Captain Kennard the next morning, dropped the packet astern and headed seaward into the teeth of the breeze.

"She works to windward superbly, and so far has proven herself a matchless craft."

"Now for a blow to try her in, when I believe she will do equally as well," said the admiring captain.

He did not get the blow just then, but he got almost a calm, and still the schooner sneaked through the water at a pace none believed possible.

Advantage was taken of the quiet weather to get her thoroughly in ship-shape, and the day was spent in adjusting her sails, rigging and ballast.

At night a strong wind came down over the stern, and the schooner went before it with bow up, and logged twelve knots out of a ten-knot breeze.

At midnight the wind increased to half a gale, and Captain Kennard remained up all night watching the workings of his vessel.

"The craft is priceless, for in any wind she is fleet as a bird, and I am in luck."

"We should reach the Kennebec this afternoon, so call me when we do," and so saying Captain Kennard retired to his cabin to sleep, for he had been so wrapped up in his vessel he had lost his rest since leaving port.

The cabin was luxuriously furnished, for in spending another man's money, Jacob Bentley had spared no expense.

There were sofas, ottomans, a book-case, easy-chairs, a soft carpet and all to make the place cosy and attractive.

Four state-rooms opened into the cabin, and forward of these were less pretentious quarters for the officers, and still forward the crew's abiding-place.

The lying idle for over a year had not hurt the craft, and she had been put in perfect condition.

She was as graceful in model as wood and iron could make her, and she sat on the waters like a duck, yet had depth enough to stand up well under canvas.

Her bows were sharp as a wedge, her stern lean and swallow-like, and her masts rose to a vast height above her decks, while her main boom seemed a rival in length for her masts.

The masts being exceptionally far apart, gave her a good spread of foresail, and her bowsprit ran out half her length over the bows, which enabled her to carry enormous jibs.

The sides had been pierced for eight guns, but the ports had been securely screwed down, while she had good quarters for seventy men, and stowing capacity in the hold for considerable freight.

It had been the desire of Doctor Brandon to have the schooner perfect in all things, and then get an extended leave from Government for his son, and have him command her as a privateer.

But the end of the war broke into this scheme, and the result was that she was laid up to await Noel Brandon's return home.

The painful circumstances of that return, the reader is already acquainted with, and the Moonbeam thus fell into the hands of Captain Kennard.

Rigged out as a sailor, the captain was not the dandy he had looked when in the office of Bentley & Co., for the first time.

He looked more the man, and after leav-

ing port he gave up his gold spectacles, and his bright eyes seemed really not to need them.

He seemed to be a thorough sailor, and his men doubtless knew him to be such, and sprung nimbly to obey his commands.

But altogether the face of Captain Kennard was not an attractive one.

He had resolution in it, a certain degree of pluck, but it was sinister in expression and looked false.

It was not a face a child would be drawn to with confidence.

He seemed particularly pleased with himself, his vessel and the world in general, as he gazed around the cabin, and smiled blandly as he said:

"This will do far better than I dreamed of."

"Now, this is a fine beginning, and so may the end be."

"I have a little idea that may alter my plans somewhat, and that is to marry the sweet Joyce Brandon."

"She is lovely in face, exquisite in form, and is said to have a fortune in her own right, left her by her maternal grandfather, and in case that her brother dies, she gets his inheritance too, from the same party."

"Noel is said to be dead, and if living he will not turn up to claim the property, so I will be in luck."

"Then Joyce will be the sole heir of her parents, and I do not believe either of them will live long under the disgrace of Noel's conduct."

"Yes, I shall go in to win, and a few days on shipboard with her will tell me just what my chances are."

"I shall make the run a long one back to Boston, if all goes well, and if not, why I will let my other plan hold good."

"It will be better to settle down ashore, with a lovely wife, in the enjoyment of a fortune, than have to make it upon the high seas after long hardship and danger."

"Yes, I will try to win the fair Joyce, and all will go well."

So deciding as to his future course, the gallant sailor set himself to the business of sleeping, and so sweet were his dreams that hours passed away and, as he did not come on deck, his mate went after him.

For a man who slept well, he awoke with a terrible start and seized the mate in a grip of iron, while he yelled excitedly:

"Keep them off! Keep them off!"

"Why, skipper! you must have had the nightmare," said the alarmed mate.

"Yes, yes, I had the nightmare, for I saw two people whom I believed to be dead, coming after me to choke me with their bony fingers, and here in broad daylight."

"But where are we?" and Captain Kennard shuddered.

"A league off the Kennebec, sir."

"All right, I will come on deck," and Captain Kennard hastily dressed and left the cabin.

It was nearly sunset, and the man gazed fixedly at the rugged coast, while he said:

"Talbot, I know the waters here somewhat, but do not dare attempt to take the schooner into the Brandon Hall harbor, so run up a signal at the fore for a pilot."

The signal was set, and, as the schooner stood nearer in-shore the mate said:

"A sail skiff is putting out, sir."

"Yes, I see it; but the sail prevents my seeing who is in it."

Nearer and nearer came the skiff, until suddenly Captain Kennard uttered an oath through his shut teeth, and said quickly:

"Here, Talbot!"

"Yes, sir."

"There is one in that skiff I do not wish to see, for my home is on this coast, and it is my desire to go there by night, after landing, and surprise them."

"Yes, sir."

"You take command, and tell her the captain is laid up, hurt."

"Her?"

"Yes, don't you see that it is a girl? and her name is Madcap Madge."

"I thought it was a pilot?"

"So she is, and there is no better pilot on this coast than that girl."

"Tell her you wish to run into Brandon Hall harbor, where you can load the schooner, and pay her for her work, saying that you have some one on board to run the craft out."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right; I will go to my state-room, and keep her out of the cabin."

"Yes, sir; but I never was much of a hand to stop a woman from doing anything she wished to."

Just then came in a musical voice:

"Schooner, ahoy! do you wish a pilot?"

"Ay, ay! Yes, miss—I mean, yes, we want a pilot," stammered Talbot, while Captain Kennard darted below in hot haste.

"All right, sir, luff sharp and I will board you," came the decisive answer, and a moment after Madcap Madge stood upon the deck of the Moonbeam.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SAILOR'S DIARY.

THE day before the Moonbeam appeared off the Kennebec river, Joyce Brandon had ridden over to the cottage of the Vernons, and the two maidens had sought the outlook arbor for a talk.

"We are expecting the schooner after us daily, now, Madge, so we will not see much more of each other," said Joyce, while the tears arose in her eyes.

"I shall be very sorry to have you go, Joyce; but it cannot be helped, and, from what you tell me, I believe that your mother would die if she stayed here."

"Yes, and father is breaking too, for I observe it, though he does not."

"But Madge, I was over at the village yesterday, and Captain Buntline told me that all my brother's baggage was there, and, as he had promised to keep them for him, he had said nothing about the things being there; but my poor brother being now dead he wished to give them into my keeping."

Madge said nothing, and Joyce continued: "Now I do not care for either father or mother, under the circumstances, to see these things, and so I told him I would send for them, and you will give them storage room here until—until—well, until I send for them, Madge."

"Why I'll do it with pleasure, Joyce, and if you give an order for them Melmer and Sam can run up in the sloop and get them."

"I will be so thankful to you if they would go, and I'll give you the order now, so that I can feel that they are safe before I go to Boston."

The two then went to the cottage, and Joyce wrote the order to Captain Buntline, and Sam and Melmer started in the yacht up to the village after them.

Then the maidens returned to the cliff arbor and Joyce said:

"Now, Madge, when Captain Buntline showed me into the room where the things were kept, it nearly broke my heart to think of my brother as dead; but then your words came to me, to hope, and I felt much better, and I still hope on."

"Yes, Joyce, without hope what would this world be to us, and I hope even against all hope."

"You are a noble girl, Madge; but here, let me show you this book, which was in my brother's dressing-case, and which I took with me, when I saw what it was."

As she spoke she took out of the pocket in her riding habit, a small book, the binding of morocco, and with a clasp of silver.

"At first I thought it was a Bible, handsomely bound, but upon opening it, Madge, see what I discovered."

She undid the clasp as she spoke, and Madge saw that it was a blank-book, but fully one-half of the pages had been closely written on in a small, even hand, which she recognized as the writing of Noel Brandon, for he had several times written to her from foreign lands.

"Oh, Joyce! should we read it?" she asked.

"See, it is a journal, and was begun five years ago, but gives only important events, and incidents in his life."

"See!"

Madge saw the title page open before her, and read aloud:

"MY VOYAGE OF LIFE.

Begun December 25th, 17—.

Ends—.

NOEL BRANDON."

"The date December 25th, 17—, was when he was born, Madge; but who will write the ending here—fill up the blank he has left?"

"Who knows?" softly said Madge.

"You see the diary begins with his earliest recollections of dear old Brandon Hall, the day he learned to ride, the day he learned to swim, and when he first mastered the alphabet—all are down.

"Then come his later boyhood years, when he had killed his first game with a rifle, and gone out in a storm in charge of a boat, with the date that he went to the village school.

"Your name is here, Madge, and he speaks of the time he saved your life, and when in turn you saved his.

"He speaks of how near death he came, when that bad young man, Darke Darrell, tried to kill him.

"Then begin his days at sea, and his life aboard ship is minutely told.

"Then his cruises, his returning home, and his again meeting you, he writes of.

"Next his going away on his last cruise, the one that has ended so fatally, and—"

"Joyce!" suddenly cried Madge, earnestly.

"Yes, Madge."

"You have looked all through that journal?"

"Yes."

"Then turn to the story he tells of his duel with the lieutenant he killed."

Joyce looked over the leaves and read aloud:

"To-day the cup of my bitterness was filled to overflowing, for, after standing the persecutions of Lieutenant — until patience ceased to be a virtue, I resented his conduct and have sent him a challenge."

"He is my superior in rank, it is true; but I could stand no more, and, the pet of our captain, he has turned him too against me, and my life has been made one of utter wretchedness."

"But the die is cast, the challenge has been sent, and what will be the end?"

Here there was a break of two days, and then Joyce read aloud:

"The end has come, and yet not the end, for I am under arrest in my state-room, and threatened with being dismissed in disgrace."

"Yesterday I met Lieutenant — in a duel. He accepted my challenge and chose swords, and I disarmed him and gave him his life."

"He was enraged beyond reason and demanded a second meeting with pistols, and I granted it."

"We fired together at the word, and he fell dead."

"Alas! I have rid myself of my bitter persecutor, but I have ended my career of usefulness in the navy, for my captain means to visit upon me the direst punishment he can inflict."

"Well, my dreams of ambition have had their awaking, and end in a nightmare."

"So be it, I await my fate."

Again there was a skip of dates, and once more Joyce read aloud:

"My doom has come, the ax has fallen, and I am disgraced by dismissal."

"To-day I bade my brother officers a last farewell."

"Strange that my captain, he who has persecuted me for the lieutenant's sake, and now hates me as his slayer, should have come ashore in the same boat with me."

"Is this a foreboding that he will yet dog my steps through life with his hatred?"

"Strange too, that my last act as an officer was to order a man triced up and flogged."

"He swore revenge openly to my face; but will he keep his oath, I wonder?"

"But he was a bad fellow, a desperate hound, and Coxswain Ned Bronson, you got your just deserts in that flogging."

Another skip of dates followed, and then came:

"I met Captain — at the same inn where I am stopping in New York, and he scowled savagely at me."

"He is in my debt heavily for gambling dues, as was Lieutenant — and the idea now occurs that that is the reason of their persecution, for they treated me well enough before they owed me."

"It may be that he has come here to get money, which I heard he expected, and will pay me."

"So be it, I shall not refuse what is my due."

"A letter received to-day from my messmate Dick Noble, dear old fellow, tells me that Coxswain Ned Bronson has deserted the ship, and bids me look out for him, as he is a dangerous fellow to run across after my punishment of him."

"He says they traced him to a vessel sailing for New York, so I will keep my eyes open for a sight of his ugly figurehead."

Another entry was the last in the book, and it read simply:

"I shall start home within an hour; will I be welcome there, with the brand of disgrace upon me?"

"Who knows?"

As Joyce read the last words she turned to Madge and asked quickly:

"Why, Madge! what ails you?"

"Nothing."

"You look ill."

"It is nothing; I was merely thinking, that is all, and the blood rushed to my head; but I am all right now, and I would like to ask you to lend me that book."

"Why, certainly, Madge, for I meant to

ask you to keep it with the other things of poor Noel's."

"I will take good care of it, I assure you, and all else you leave in my care."

"I know that, Madge; but now I must return, or my parents will be anxious about me; but I will see you again before I go."

"Oh, yes, for I would not be surprised if I had to pilot the vessel up to the Hall haven, as father is away, and there is no one else to do it."

"I hope you will, Madge; but is your father not away a great deal of late?"

"Yes, he seems constantly upon the go," and Madge changed the subject quickly, while Joyce soon after mounted her horse and rode back to Brandon Hall.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DEPARTURE.

WHEN Madcap Madge sprung on board the Moonbeam, Mate Talbot was completely taken aback.

She was more beautiful in his eyes than a picture, and his heart began to throb audibly.

"You a pilot?" he asked in an embarrassed way.

"Yes, sir; are you the captain?" was the terse reply.

"No, I am the mate; the captain's abed sick—I mean hurt; he got hurt, miss, and can't see you, though I know he'd like to; but I'll do as well, won't I?"

"Oh, yes, if you know where you are going?"

"Yes, miss, I know; we want to go to Brandon Hall harbor."

"Ah! this is the schooner—"

"The schooner Moonbeam, miss, sent after Doctor Brandon and his family."

"They have been expecting the vessel for several days."

"Yes, miss, we did not get her fitted out as soon as we expected; but we are here now."

"So I see," was the dry reply, and Madge stepped to the wheel.

Then, in a clear voice that rung throughout the ship, she ordered the topsails down, the foresail lowered, and the mainsail and jib alone set, saying:

"She will work better, sir, in this breeze with little sail, and I want your crew to stand by to obey orders promptly, for we are going into dangerous waters."

"They look it, miss; but don't you think dark will overtake us?"

"What if it should?"

"Could you see to run these waters in the dark?" and Talbot gazed ahead at the dangerous course they had to sail over.

"Yes, with my eyes shut," was the terse reply, and the mate regarded Madcap Madge as a being not of earth.

At her orders, the crew sprung lively, for they saw that the Girl Pilot knew just what she was about, and they obeyed without question.

As for Talbot, he had fallen in love, but had he known how quickly Madge had diagnosed him, he would not have felt flattered.

"I do not like the mate, or the crew."

"He is sinister looking, and is a bad man, though he may be embarrassed before me."

"As for the men, they are a villainous-looking set, and the other man I saw on deck was strangely like that rascal Darke Darrell, though of course it could not be he, as Bentley & Co. would only send a reliable man as commander."

"Then turning to the mate, she asked:

"Who was the person on deck with you when I came out?"

"The captain, miss."

"I thought you said he had been injured and was lying in the cabin?"

Talbot saw that he had made a mistake, so he stammered out of it with:

"Yes, miss, but he's able to walk; but suffered so much he went below soon as we had found a pilot."

"I see! What is your captain's name?"

"Kennard, miss."

"He was sent by Bentley & Co.?"

"Yes, miss."

"I guess I was mistaken, and that it's all right," muttered Madge, and she said no more, unless to give an order, until they ran into the little harbor.

Then she asked:

"When does your captain expect to sail?"

"As soon as he can, miss."

"Well, I will go ashore and report your arrival at the Hall, and pilot you to sea again when you are ready to go out."

"Yes, miss, but the captain told me to ask you your fee, and to say he had some one coming aboard to pilot the schooner out."

"There are but two persons on this coast, that can run this schooner from this anchorage to open water."

"One is my father, the other is myself; so that I shall go anyhow, as I wish to see my friend Miss Brandon past all danger."

Mate Talbot was squelched.

His instructions had gone no further, so he said:

"What is your fee, miss?"

"Nothing."

"Wait, miss, until I see the captain, please," and Talbot ran below for instructions.

In a few words he reported the situation up on deck.

"Curse her! she'll have her way, so I've got nothing to do but to hide here in my state-room until the craft is again at sea."

"Hand her these letters from old Bentley, tell her I am laid up from an accident, and ask her to give them to the doctor with regrets from me that I cannot get out."

"Then see that we get out of this as soon as possible."

"That girl is the devil," and with this opinion of the lady who had won his heart, Mate Talbot left the cabin in a huff.

Madge took the letters, her skiff, which had been towing astern, was brought alongside, and she rowed shoreward, and walked rapidly up to Brandon Hall.

Joyce was walking up and down the piazza, for she had seen the schooner's lights as she came in, and sprung to meet her.

"Ah, Madge, it is you, and I am so glad to see you!"

"Yes, I acted as pilot, Joyce, and will see you safe out to sea when you sail, but the schooner's captain is laid up from an accident, and sent your father these letters."

"I will give them to him, and you will be my guest to-night."

Joyce entered the house and handed her father the letters, telling him that the schooner had come, and the circumstance of Madcap Madge acting as pilot.

"Well, we are in no danger with that girl at the wheel, that is certain."

"Where is she?"

"On the piazza, and I have asked her to be my guest to-night."

"Well, I suppose you could do nothing else; but to-morrow night we get away, and then this strange friendship for a smuggler's daughter ends."

Joyce was about to make an angry reply, but said nothing, and left the room, and led Madge to her own apartments.

Then, until late into the night the two sat talking together; but the early morning found them up and packing, and looking out of the window they saw that the servants were already carting the luggage down to the schooner.

At breakfast Madge met Doctor Brandon and his wife, and they bowed coldly to her and the meal was eaten almost in silence.

During the day the old mansion was locked up, the shutters were nailed close, the servants were discharged, and when at last the family departed for the beach it presented a most forlorn, desolate appearance.

It was sunset before all the things had been safely stowed on board the schooner, and then Madge stepped to the helm.

"You do not think we had better wait until morning, girl, for this is a dangerous gantlet to run, and the night is very dark?" said Doctor Brandon anxiously.

"No, sir, it is best to go out to night, for the weather is threatening, and, as you know, Doctor Brandon, this harbor is only safe in storms from landward."

"Yes; do as you deem best; but I'll go and see the captain, for I don't like that mate's looks," and Doctor Brandon went below, while the schooner swung loose from her anchorage, and headed through the dangerous gantlet.

In a short while the doctor returned.

"Did you see the captain, father?"

"Yes, and I do not like his looks any bet-

ter than I do the mate's, and, for the life of me, I cannot tell where he is injured.

"He's doubtless lazy, and got a fall, so takes it as an excuse to lay up; but girl, you must have good eyes, to see your way through these waters."

"I have good eyes, sir, and there is no danger—sail ho!" and her voice rung as she uttered the words.

There, coming out from behind an island was a vessel, and after a glance at it, Madge said:

"It is the Blue Bell's double."

"What is it, girl?"

"A craft I have before seen in these waters, but I do not know the name of."

A moment more and the Blue Bell had swept by, and the schooner held steadily on until open water was reached.

"Mr. Mate, you are in open water now, sir, and if you'll lay to I'll leave you," said Madge.

Then an affectionate parting followed between Madge and Joyce, and Dr. Brandon, breaking for once his haughty and cold manner, said:

"I thank you, Miss Vernon, and I would have offered you a liberal fee, but Joyce begged me not to do so."

"If I can ever repay the debt I owe you, call upon me."

"Good-by."

Madge bowed, kissed Joyce again, and was soon flying homeward under a stiff breeze, while the Moonbeam held on her way—*whither?*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MOONBEAM'S CAPTAIN.

"Has she gone?"

The question was asked by Captain Kennard, as his mate entered his state-room.

"She has, sir, and there is every indication of a storm."

"Where are the passengers?"

"The old lady in her state-room, and her husband with her."

"The young lady?"

"On deck."

"You are sure Madcap Madge is gone?"

"I am sorry to say she has, sir, for I felt safer with her in the vessel; but I luffed for her a few minutes ago, and she went off in her skiff, flying away like a sea-gull."

"I shall come at once on deck," and, as the mate left the state-room, Captain Kennard arose, dressed himself with great care, and went on deck.

Joyce stood leaning over the taffrail, gazing astern at the fast-receding shores, and the red light, which she knew burned in the little arbor outlook on the cliff near the Vernon cottage.

She knew Madge would keep her word and wave it to her in farewell, when she arrived at home, so she kept her eye fixed upon the light.

A seaman stood at the wheel, and the mate paced to and fro not far off, while the watch lolled forward, ready for work if called upon.

Amidships were the servants of Brandon Hall, half a dozen in number, and seemingly glad of a chance to visit the great city of Boston.

Walking aft, for he had come up through the steerage, Captain Kennard limped in his gait, and stopping near where Joyce was determined to make his presence known.

"How does she head, my man?" he asked in his most sailor-like tones.

"Sou' by ea', sir, a little sou'," was the unintelligible reply that greeted the ears of Joyce.

The voice of the captain caused her to turn, and he stood just where the companionway lamp fell full upon him.

She saw a fine form, a face that was by no means homely, and, under its best auspices, the sinister look was concealed.

He did not look like an ordinary man either, and when he caught her eye he bowed low, raised his cap, and said:

"Have I the honor of addressing Miss Brandon?"

"You have, sir, and I suppose you are Captain Kennard?"

"Yes, lady, and it gives me pleasure to welcome you on board ship, and I regret that an accident, that crippled me, kept me confined to my state-room."

"I hope you are better, sir?"

"No, but I heard there was a storm rising, so came on deck to look out for the welfare of the schooner, for she carries precious freight, Miss Brandon."

"Yes, we have much that is valuable on board," she answered, purposely misunderstanding him.

"I feel like an old friend to you, Miss Brandon, for I was very intimate with your brother."

"Indeed!" and she started.

"Yes, we sailed together upon the same ship."

"Then you were in the navy?"

"Yes, I had that honor;" but he did not say that it was the honor of serving before the mast, and naturally Joyce did not hint at such a thing.

In fact she had no reason to doubt the man, only, after she had spoken with him she did not like him, and somehow the impression came over her that she had met the man before.

His referring to her brother as a friend, however, interested her, and she asked:

"When was it that you knew my brother, Captain Kennard?"

"At the time he was on the sloop-of-war President, Miss Brandon; but I left just after he did."

"Ah! you were there when he had his unfortunate affair with his senior lieutenant?"

"Yes, and all of his brother officers upheld him in it, miss, unless it was his captain, and to him did Noel owe his dismissal; but I can never believe that your brother could be guilty of slaying the captain afterward."

"God bless you for those words, sir," and Joyce held out her hand, which the man grasped warmly.

Then he turned to look after the vessel, ordered reefs put in the sails, and all made snug to meet the storm, which was now liable to burst upon them at any moment.

"There! see there! Madge is at home, and safe!" suddenly cried Joyce, her words and manner causing the skipper to start in alarm.

But looking in the direction she was pointing, he discovered a red light swinging in circles.

"She promised to wave the light when she returned, and I have been waiting here patiently to see it," explained Joyce.

This settled the skipper, for he had hoped Joyce had been waiting on his account.

But he said:

"You like that girl, miss?"

"I love her, for she is the most noble girl I ever saw, and as beautiful in character as in face."

"Yes, she is very beautiful," he averred.

"You have seen her then?"

"Well, I can hardly say that; but I caught a glimpse of her when she came on board," said the skipper in a composed way.

"She is a better sailor than many an officer in the navy to-day, and does not know what fear is; but here comes the storm, and I will go below."

"Good-night, Captain Kennard," and she descended to the cabin.

Soon after the storm broke with great violence, and the schooner pitched terribly; but the passengers felt that the vessel was in no danger, for Joyce had told her parents that the captain had gone on deck when he heard the storm coming up.

"He is a good seaman, I guess, and in fact Bentley would not send him unless he knew him to be so," said the doctor.

All through the night the storm continued, and when the morning broke the schooner was scudding before the gale with just enough canvas set to steady her on her course.

All day long the schooner was held on the same course, and Joyce asked if she was headed toward Boston.

"Oh, no, miss, the storm forced us to scud before it, and we will be several days late in reaching port; but it is better so than to have an accident."

"By far, sir; but was the blow a very severe one?"

"Most terrific, and I have not left the deck all night."

"You are certainly a devoted commander, Captain Kennard."

"I am as devoted to my ship, Miss Brandon, as I would be to a fair lady-love, did I have one to make my life happy," he said,

in a voice and with a look she could not but understand was meant for her.

She made no reply and turned away, and he bit his lip with vexation, while he muttered:

"Last night I thought I had won her; but to-day she seems to dislike me."

"I will try her a couple of days, and then if she refuses to be my wife, she shall have time to repent and change her mind."

"Did she behave differently all would be well for her; but with her airs, she must not expect me to be merciful," and the man's face became actually fiendish, and, standing in the light, Joyce saw it and shuddered, for a chill seemed to come upon her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE KENNEBEC CORSAIR.

SEVERAL weeks passed away after the sailing of the Moonbeam from Boston harbor, and she had not returned.

Mr. Jacob Bentley, senior, partner of the firm of Bentley & Co., began to grow very anxious and he nearly worried the soul-care out of poor Vezey asking him if he had heard any news of the vessel.

Vezey encouraged him with the idea that Doctor Brandon had not been ready, and so had detained the schooner.

"But he would have written surely," said Mr. Bentley, and so he rushed off to the office of the Kennebec packets.

Captain West had just come in, and he told the merchant that he had made several voyages since he had sailed that day ahead of the Moonbeam.

"So that was your craft, was it?"

"Well, now, why didn't you know she were for sale, for I'd 'a' tuckered to her rather than have the one I has built."

"Why, she's the fastest craft I ever seen afloat, and was the second one I ever see get ahead o' the Queen o' ther Kennebec, t'other one being a specter vessel, the ghost o' the sloop Blue Bell, or she c'u'dn't hev did it."

"But you have seen nothing of the schooner, captain?"

"Not sin' she showed me her heels that night, sir; but I did hear, when I touched at the village, that Doctor Brandon and his whole family, servants and all, had left, nailed up the house, and there were nobody there."

"When did they leave?"

"Oh, over two months ago."

"My God! and the schooner has not arrived yet?"

"Waal, you is anxious about her?"

"Yes."

"You has a right to be."

"You think she will yet show up?"

"Waal, she sh'u'd have been here long afore this; but I cannot tell, and I did hear talk o' a pirate on my trip down."

"A pirate?"

"Yes, a real out-and-outer, and no mistake."

"I run across a brig as I was signaling in distress, and her captain told me how he had been brought to by a pirate skunner."

"A schooner?" gasped the merchant.

"Yes, and a fast one too, the skipper of the brig said."

"This is fearful," and so saying Jacob Bentley hastened back to tell Vezey the news.

Vezey was in despair, for he had seen a miniature likeness of Joyce Brandon, and had ordered a new suit of clothes, hat and shoes, for he was determined to make an impression upon her, and did not doubt but that he could.

As confidential clerk he had heard enough of the financial affairs of the Brandons, to know that Joyce was rich, and he was getting tired of toiling like a slave for his daily bread, so had made up his mind to marry Joyce.

"I wish I had gone on the schooner, sir," he said courageously.

"If you had the pirate would have hanged you first thing," was the blunt reply of the merchant.

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated Vezey, and he remained quiescent.

But another day passed and still no news of the schooner.

Then the packet sailed for the Kennebec, and the next day she put back to Boston, and Captain West reported having been chased, captured and plundered by a pirate.

This was startling news indeed, but there was a more horrible side to it still, when Captain West went to Jacob Bentley and said:

"I seen your schooner."
 "Ah! where?"
 "At sea."
 "Coming in?"
 "Guess not."
 "Why?"
 "It hain't healthy in here for her."
 "I wish you would explain."
 "Your schooner was the craft that raced out with me some few weeks ago?"
 "Yes."
 "Extra tall masts?"
 "She had."
 "Very long and narrow?"
 "Yes."
 "And lean swallow-tail stern?"
 "The same."
 "Had a red belt around her from bow to stern?"
 "Yes, a crimson band."
 "I see, and carried a boom as long as her mainmast?"
 "Yes, nearly."
 "And bowsprit as long as her foremast?"
 "Almost."
 "Was named Moonbeam?"
 "She was, she was!"
 "She hain't named that now."
 "No, what is her name?"
 "The Serpent."
 "No!"
 "Yes, and she has a figurehead of a serpent, and a large black flag with a red serpent in the center."
 "My God! that is a pirate emblem."
 "Certain."
 "That man has turned pirate."
 "The schooner has."
 "Did you see her captain?"
 "I did, for he boarded me and robbed me."
 "Describe him."
 "Well, as nigh as I can."
 "Was he handsome?"
 "Handsome be durned! do you think I could see anything handsome in a man who had robbed me?"
 "How did he look?"
 "Like the devil, for he had a face that was wicked clean through, and I know it well, for I have had him on board my craft before, and it's not the first time his figurehead has been seen on a pirate craft, for Kennebec folks as knew him when a boy have told how they have seen him on outlaw decks, boarding with the rest of the cutthroats."
 "I didn't want to believe it, for his old mother's sake; but he's bad clean through, tried to commit a murder years ago, and thought he had; then he ran away, went to gambling, served in a man-o'-war, and then turned common pirate; but now he goes in deep, steals your schooner and waltzes out as a corsair of the worst kind."
 "Describe him."
 "'Tain't no use, for he's the same man I seen on the Moonbeam when she sailed out o' port that afternoon four weeks ago."
 "And he boarded you?"
 "Now did he; but he outrun me first, boarded me, took my cargo, and then sailed away telling me that for old friendship's sake he would not harm me, my passengers or crew."
 "But has he guns?"
 "Well, now, he has."
 "How many?"
 "He has four to a broadside, then two stern guns that are eighteens, and a bow pivot, a thirty-two, eleven all told."
 "And men?"
 "Some four-score, and hard-looking fellows they were."
 "But where is Doctor Brandon and his family?"
 "That's what I asked him, knowing you was anxious about them."
 "And what did he say?"
 "He laughed."
 "And made no reply?"
 "That laugh was reply enough for me, as it made my flesh crawl."
 "My God! what has become of my poor friends?"
 "I wish I knew."
 "Well, come with me on board the Scorpion, and tell the commander all you know."

The two men went together on board the Scorpion, and Mayo Maynard received them in his cabin and bade them be seated.

In a few words Jacob Bentley told how the man had come to him to buy a vessel, had shown good testimonials, paid a thousand dollars for repairs to be done, and asked to sail the vessel to the Kennebec after Doctor Brandon, that he might try her, and since then nothing had been heard of her, until Captain West told his terrible story.

"Where did she overhaul you?" asked Mayo Maynard.

"Off the Isle of Shoals, sir, a league to the south."

"When?"

"Last night early."

"Pardon me a moment," and Mayo Maynard stepped upon deck and gave orders to get the schooner under way at once.

Then he returned to the cabin, and asked both men all manner of questions regarding the pirate craft, making note of their answers.

"Now, gentlemen, I thank you, and, as the schooner is under way, I shall have to bid you farewell, and I hope to return with your Sea Serpent Corsair."

When the merchant and Captain West went over the side, the schooner was moving and the old skipper remarked:

"That young officer is all business."

"Yes, he means to capture the pirate if he can, and it will be a big feather for him, if he can do so; but Lordy! what can the Corsair have done with the Brandons?"

"I don't know; but I know what they did with my cargo?"

"What?"

"Stole it."

"When do you sail again?"

"Soon as I've loaded up again."

"Well, captain, bring me back all the news you can from the Kennebec, and come see me as soon as you arrive."

"Now let us go into the Inn here that I may drink your very good health."

"I'll do it, for I need to splice the main brace," was the reply, and the two worthies took several tipples together and parted the best of friends.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PIRATE AND HIS SON.

"CAN my years of repentance wash out my past crimes, I wonder?"

"Heaven grant it! oh, Heaven grant it!"

The words were uttered by a man whose years might be beyond the allotted span of life, for he seemed nearly four-score years and ten.

He was a man of majestic presence, tall of form, broad-shouldered, and with long white beard and hair, a venerable patriarch in appearance.

His eyes were black, and had not wholly lost their fire, but his hands trembled, and it was evident that before very long the tottering feet would walk into the grave.

He sat alone in a log hut, not uncomfortable inside, and yet not filled with luxury.

There were two rooms, one opening into the other, the one a sitting-room and kitchen, the other a bedroom, for bunks were visible against the back wall in the second chamber.

A few pine knots blazed upon the hearth, for the night was chilly, and a lamp swung over a table, shedding a soft light in the room.

The old man sat in an easy-chair, and his eyes were gazing upon the burning pine knots, as though he saw pictures in the flames.

He was dressed in an undress uniform, that looked as though it belonged to the quarter-deck.

Such was the old Hermit Sailor, who dwelt alone in the vicinity of the village on the Kennebec, where we laid many of the scenes of this romance.

His cabin stood among the rocks, upon a point of land against which the waves washed with mimic roar of the ocean's surf.

The cabin was strongly built, and its rear was against a rocky wall, the cliff rising above and overhanging it.

The words that open this chapter broke instinctively from the old man's lips, as though called therefrom by some bitter memories that flooded upon him.

Without, the night was dark and stormy,

and the rain beat with ceaseless patter upon the shingled roof.

Had the villagers heard the old hermit's despairing cry, they would indeed have believed that they had a right to call him Captain Kyd.

Some said he had sailed with that famous pirate, others were certain that he knew where were buried treasures, and a few looked upon him as a wizard.

He had come to the village long years before.

He had bought his land and built his cabin, and seemed very poor.

One night he had been attacked by some one and left for dead, and Madcap Madge had found him, and had cared for him since in many kindly ways.

His lips were silent as to who had been his assailant, and this silence but added to the mystery surrounding him.

Now, as he sat there by himself, alone in the world, with but two beings in the world who were friendly to him—Madcap Madge and her father—the old man's existence seemed desolate indeed, and he murmured:

"How long ere the end will come?"

A tap upon the door caused him to start.

He seldom had a visitor, and in fact no one except Madge, and now and then the skipper, Vernon.

"Who can it be?" he asked himself; but he remained seated.

Again the tap came.

"Who is there?"

"Madge," said a low voice outside.

"Ah, girl, is it you? What brings you out on such a night?"

"I will unbar at once," said the old man, and he walked to the door, took down the bar, and it was suddenly thrown open and a man stepped in.

The Hermit Sailor started back, covering his face with his hands, and cried:

"You here?"

"Yes," was the sullen answer.

"How strange that you should find me here."

"Is it strange that a son should find his father?"

"Come, old man, give me welcome, or resume your seat and let me welcome myself."

"I will bar the door again, for the night is chilly, and I need the warmth of your fire, for I am wet."

As he spoke, the intruder, for such he seemed, threw more pine knots on the fire, and then hung his wet cloak upon a rail.

His tarpaulin, for he was dressed in sailor garb, was thrown upon a chair, and then he said:

"Any grog?"

"Yes, there is some in the cupboard," was the answer of the old man, as he sunk back in his chair once more.

"I am wet without, and dry within, so I'll treat myself to some of your grog."

He found a flask and a glass and poured out a generous drink.

"Ah! this is good; but you always were an epicure in liquors, old man," and the seaman again threw himself into a chair before the fire.

He was a man of large stature, heavy shoulders, and the look of one who possessed great brute strength.

His face was cast in a strong mold, and yet it was the strength of wickedness that was stamped upon every feature.

He had a face that might have borne the imprint of nobleness of nature, and yet it was one that a demon might possess.

"Well, what brings you here, boy?" asked the Hermit Sailor, calling him boy though he was fully forty-five years of age.

"To see my old father," was the reply.

"No filial duty caused you to come."

"No, I came for ducats, old man."

"You know that I am poor."

"I know that you say so."

"You will get nothing from me, boy."

"You have got gold, ay, and jewels, and I believe you keep them hidden in this old rookery."

"You failed to find any when you searched for them."

"I failed to find them?" and the man wheeled suddenly toward his father.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"You must not deal in enigmas with me."

"Nor do I, for I repeat, you searched this cabin diligently and found nothing, and why you have come back here now I cannot tell."

"Old man, your mind is wandering."

"It is strange that it is not wholly crazed; but do you think, Jasper Clyde, that I did not know you the night you came here, masked though you were, demanded money, and then left me for dead while you searched this place for gold?"

"It is a lie! I never was here before."

"You were."

"I did not know where you were."

"How did you find me out now?"

"I traced you here, after hearing in the village that one answering your description lived here."

"You traced me then, but were foiled, and now you have come back again, to be again foiled."

"Old man, I must have gold."

"Would you try again to take my life, if I refused?"

"No!"

"Bah! you would; and you would have killed me then, had it not been that one found me who saved my life, and God forever bless her."

"A woman?"

"A child woman."

"Who is she?"

"One whom your very look would pollute."

"Her name?"

"Men call her Madcap Madge."

"Ha! the Siren of the Sea and Queen of the Kennebec, as she is also called."

"You know of her, so you are not such a stranger in these parts after all."

"I have heard of her as a desperate, darling girl."

"She is an angel."

"You seem in love with her."

"I am, as with a daughter who had been ever dutiful and kind."

"Well, let the girl rest and tell me where I can get gold."

"I have none for you."

"You know where I can get it."

"Earn it."

"I cannot work, for you brought me up to be a pirate."

The old Hermit Sailor winced at this and muttered:

"Alas, too true."

"As you made me a pirate, support me."

"I have no gold to give to you."

"Come, I need a vessel, and I cannot get one on credit."

"Give me enough to purchase a suitable craft, fit her out and man her, and I will never cross your path again."

"I will give you no gold for I have none for you."

"What has the famous pirate of forty years ago, known as Clyde the Corsair, done with his vast treasures?" sneered the younger man.

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon me!"

"Bah! don't pray, for prayers from a pirate's lips ascend to Heaven as curses."

"Boy, I have tried all these latter years to repent of the past."

"A thousand years of penitence, fasting and prayer could never wash out your crimes, old man."

"But come, give me gold, or I swear to you I will force you to do so."

"You cannot."

"I will show you," and without another word he threw his cloak about him, pulled his tarpaulin over his eyes, and strode out into the stormy night, leaving the old man utterly amazed at his strange conduct.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MIDNIGHT MARAUDER.

SINCE the discovery that Madge had made, that her father was certainly in league with a secret band, and to which Gaspard and his two unfortunate mutineer companions belonged, she felt a certain restraint she could not throw off when the Skipper Vernon was near her.

What the secret league was she could not surmise, and yet that the stories about her dearly loved father had been other than falsehoods, she never had for a moment doubted.

Still, what she had seen herself she could not doubt, and if the strange sloop, the double of the Blue Bell, had been in the island basin, where the band were, it certainly had been the same band that had boarded the Queen of the Kennebec, taken Job Jennings off with his merchandise and hanged him.

Was this not worse than smuggling?

Was it not piracy? Such were the questions she asked herself:

Fretting about it and miserable after the departure of Joyce Brandon, Madge seemed to feel that the world was going wrong with her.

Then too she had another worry, and that was the devoted attentions of Silly Sam.

She treated him as though he was her brother, and he wished her to consider he was her lover.

He asked her to be his wife, and she replied that she would not marry him because she could not love him as a wife should.

Then he told her she should never marry any other man.

Thus matters were when the news came that the schooner Moonbeam had not arrived in port.

Joyce had promised to write Madge as soon as she arrived in Boston, and no letter had come, and, remembering the terrible storm that the schooner had encountered the night she sailed, with little confidence in the skill of the Mate Talbot, and not knowing the captain, the girl dreaded the worst, especially as the vessel had had far more than time to reach port.

But days went by and no word came of the missing vessel, and Madge was giving her up as lost, foundered in the storm of that night, when into view hove the Queen of the Kennebec.

She had a signal flying, and Madge sprung into her skiff and went out to meet her.

Captain West was at the helm, and he luffed up as she came near and asked her to board.

"Miss Madge, I've met a pirate."

"No!"

"Yes."

"When, captain?"

"Some days ago."

"Where?"

"Off the Isle of Shoals on the Hampshire coast."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it's true as Scripture, and I was robbed of my cargo, and all my passengers had to shell out."

"Why, captain?"

"Fact."

"But could you not beat him off?"

"Miss Madge, I couldn't beat him sailin', let alone beat him off."

"He just walked after me in a way the Queen couldn't understand, and robbed me of my cargo, so I put back to Boston, and this time I didn't see him."

"This is strange, Captain West."

"There's something that is stranger."

"Well?"

"Who do you think the pirates were?"

"I am sure I do not know."

"Didn't you pilot the Brandon schooner out to sea?"

"The Moonbeam?"

"Yes."

"That are the craft."

"And Joyce and her parents?" cried Madge, turning deadly pale.

"He has 'em, I guess."

"Who?"

"The pirate."

"Oh, God!"

"Well, it is kinder hard; but I always knew he were a devil."

"Who is he?"

"One you knows too, I guess."

"His name?"

"He were a Kennebec boy, and it hurts me to see a boy out o' these waters go to the bad."

"But will you tell me who he is?"

"Darke Darrell!"

Madge uttered a cry that made the old captain nearly jump overboard.

"Are you allin', miss?"

"Captain West, now I know why the captain of that schooner went below when he saw me coming out, and told a lie about being hurt."

"It was Darke Darrell, and I recall his face and form now, though I saw him indistinctly that day."

"Ah! but the day of his retribution will come, for he shall not escape."

"But what can you do, Miss Madge?"

"What any man can do when I am doing right!" she said fiercely, and then added:

"Where is your other schooner, Captain West?"

"In Boston."

"Well, when you return lay to here for me, and I will go with you to Boston, and if I cannot find a vessel there such as I want, I will buy your schooner."

"Lord! the gal has clean gone mad," said the old sailor.

"I am not mad; I mean what I say, that I will buy your schooner, and pay you well for it, and in cash, for, with a different rig and some changes, she can be made to go so that no vessel in these seas can lead her, for I saw that when I sailed her for you."

"But now I must go, for I wish to have a talk with my father."

"Be sure to fire a gun to warn me as you come down, and I may have other passengers for you," and springing into her boat Madge pulled shoreward at a pace that astonished all on the schooner, and caused the old captain to say:

"That girl has got more muscle in her pretty round arms than I ever knowed a man to have; oh! but she's a queer one."

Running into the harbor, Madge sent the skiff half its length out upon the shore, and then hastened up the hill to the cottage.

Her father had just come in from the forest, his gun on his shoulder, and a string of game hung by his side.

He was surprised at her flushed, excited face, but he also lost his usually calm mien when he heard the story she had to tell.

"Now, father, what have you to say to this?" she asked, eagerly.

"My child, I have to say that this Darrell shall be run to death, for I shall devote myself to the task of taking that lovely girl from his cruel power, and avenging her if he has in any way harmed her."

"My good father, it is noble of you to say this; but I had already determined to go to Boston and purchase a vessel, and I asked Captain West to stop for me on his outward trip, and he will do so."

"There is a secret that I did not tell you, and that is, when Norl Brandon was wounded, he sent to me by the constable a package to keep for him."

"It was a package of bank-notes, and they are in value twelve thousand dollars, and this sum I intended to purchase a vessel with, spending it in a good cause, while I have some money laid by, and jewels if I need more."

"My dear child, keep the package of money intact, and your jewels, too, for I have sufficient to buy a vessel; but my first plan is to find out the haunt of this pirate, and that I feel I am competent to do, and I will start this night in your sloop."

"You, Sam and Melmer, can take the packet, as before, to Boston, and look up a vessel there, and I will give you an order for money needed on bankers there."

"I suppose the Scorpion is already on the search for this pirate, Darrell; but if so, present a letter I will give you to parties there, and you can obtain an armament for your vessel."

"If you cannot get any other vessel to suit, then buy the Kennebec Queen at whatever price old West holds her."

"Having made your purchase, let Melmer ship you a crew, say of forty men, and set sail for home, and I hope to have in the mean while discovered the haunt of the Corsair," and then woe be unto him!

That night Skipper Vernon started upon his search, unmindful of the rain that came on, and he went alone in the little sloop.

Melmer had gone up to the village after stores, and would hardly return in the rain, and Silly Sam, brooding over his unrequited love, had gone to bed to nurse his gloomy feelings.

Until utterly worn out with plotting and planning, Madge had kept awake, and then she had dropped to sleep on the sofa, the rain soothing her as it pattered upon the roof.

Hardly had her eyes closed when a face peered in at the window.

It was the face of a man, and his cautious movements proved that he meant mischief.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DEATH-STRUGGLE.

It was a beautiful picture, Madcap Madge lying there, the lamp dimly burning, one hand thrown over her head, and her attitude that of grace and utter abandon to repose.

Stealthily in the door came the man from without, and in his hands he carried a small vial.

Softly as a cat might have done, he drew near the sofa, and placed the vial, the stopper taken out, close under her nose.

There he crouched and waited an instant, his cloak about his form, dripping wet, his tarpaulin drawn down over his eyes, his posture that of a tiger about to spring upon his prey.

But Madge moved, and the man started, and with a sudden gesture of the hand she knocked the bottle from his grasp.

A curse, a loud cry, and she was seized in his strong arms, the potent drug already having her partially under its influence.

But in answer to that wild cry, that came from the maiden's lips, a deep echo was heard.

It did not echo her cry, but it said in deep tones:

"Madge, I am here!"

Then the door was thrown back, and a form bounded into the room just as the man bearing his burden, was passing out of the front portal, his cloak folded closely around the fair girl he carried, and who was hardly capable of a struggle.

With a cry, more like issuing from a wild beast than human lips, the pursuer sprang after the kidnapper.

It was Silly Sam, but half-dressed, yet with a face that showed he meant to save Madge or die.

He had been awake, unable to sleep, and her cry had brought him from his bed, and donning what clothes he could, he rushed to the rescue.

With a bound he was after the kidnapper, who saw that he had one who could not be readily shaken off upon his track.

Turning, the man still clung to his burden, raised his pistol and fired.

A shriek broke from Silly Sam, and he swayed, as though about to fall; but he plunged on, and sprang at the back of the man, who once more fired upon him.

Again Sam staggered, halted, but once more rushed on.

Then the fugitive saw that he must stand at bay, and he once more turned, this time a knife gleaming in his hand.

But Sam rushed upon him, tore his half-unconscious burden from his grasp, and the two men clinched in a death-struggle.

Down the hill they rolled together, and then came a groan, and the fugitive arose, his hand pressed upon his breast.

"He wrenched my own knife from me and drove it into my breast; but he is done for."

"Oh, God! I must away for help, or I shall die!"

With these words he bounded down the hill, his hand pressed close upon his heart.

At the shore was a boat, the sail up, and springing into it he sped away from the land and disappeared in the gloom.

Through all Madge had been conscious, yet held powerless by the drug to help herself.

She knew all that had occurred.

She saw Sam come to the rescue.

She heard the muttered oath of her kidnapper, and saw him turn and fire.

She felt that Sam was wounded, and yet he came on.

Another shot, and still the brave fellow rushed on to her rescue.

Then came the death-struggle, and powerless to aid, she seemed like one in a trance, seeing, hearing, feeling, yet unable to stir.

At last came the groan of anguish, and the words of the kidnapper reached her ears.

With a mighty effort she moved, then sat up, and then arose to her feet.

She staggered, but yet rushed on to the side of the prostrate hero.

He lay where he had fallen, the rain pelted down pitilessly upon him.

Then lights flashed above and Philip and Phillis, bearing lanterns, came in sight.

"Oh do come to me!" cried Madge, and she knelt by the side of the prostrate form.

"Sam, oh Sam!"

"Madge."

"Are you wounded badly?"

"I don't know; I'll try and go to the house."

He half arose, and with the aid of the negress and Madge, he tottered toward the cottage, sinking upon the sofa where the maiden had been sleeping.

"Sam, tell me what I can do for you?" and she tore the shirt away from the broad breast.

There was one wound in the neck, another above the heart, and a cruel gash, made by the knife upon the right side.

"Madge, I am dying."

"No, no, Sam, for I have sent to the village for the doctor; Philip has already gone."

"He will do me no good, so call him back."

"No, you may be saved," but in her heart Madge knew she did not mean her words.

"Who was he, Madge?"

"I do not know, Sam."

"He meant to kidnap you; I heard your cry and came."

"And lost your life in my defense."

"Ah, Sam! Sam!"

"Madge, if I could not have your love, I did not want life."

"I am but a silly man, a mere idiot, and such could not win your love; but I have a heart, and all of it went out to you."

"I have done what I could, and yet I felt I would lose you, and the feeling drove me mad."

"Phillis, I feel happy now."

"Sam do not talk so."

"Yes, I feel that I have proven that an idiot has a heart, and can love, for I have given my life for you, and it makes me oh so happy."

Madge sobbed like a little child.

Fear could never dim her eyes, or cause her form to tremble, but that poor dying man, he whom men called an idiot, moved her to her innermost depths of feeling.

"Let me take your hand, Madge."

She clasped his rough hand in both her own.

"Madge, you will tell your father that I did my duty."

"Indeed I will, Sam."

"Tell Saunders the cartman, and all up at the village, that Silly Sam was no coward and died like a man."

"All shall know, Sam."

"And, Madge, one day you will become the wife of the man you love; tell him I left you for him, for, Madge, I could have killed you, rather than see another claim you."

"Oh, God! Madge, the world seems slipping away from me."

"All is dark—no, I hold your hand, yet do not feel you—take my hand, Madge, for the love of God!"

"I have your hand in mine now, Sam."

"Good God! I do not feel it—this surely is death not to feel your touch."

She went forward and in her impulsive way kissed him.

A smile swept over his face, and he said softly:

"I felt that touch of your lips, Madge; it was as an angel's kiss—thank you, Madge, and thank God!"

A convulsive shudder followed his last word, and then the hand that was held by hers, closed with a vise-like grasp—then it loosened its hold, and the life had fled from the body of Silly Sam forever.

He had died for his love's sake, and he had preferred death to life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONFESSION.

For a long time did Madge Vernon bend over the body of the dead man, who had lost his life to save her.

Phillis had crept away, when she saw that they could be of no use, and Philip had started off through the rain, on the long ride for the doctor, for Philip was not fond of the water on such a night, though in the half gale then blowing, he could have gone to the village and returned in half the usual time.

At length Madge arose from the side of the sofa, and folding the hands across the broad breast, called to Phillis:

"He is dead, Phillis."

"Yes, miss; but what were it all about?" asked the negress in wonder.

"A man attempted to get me unconscious with some drug, and then to carry me off; but I awoke with a cry, Sam heard it, and came to my rescue."

"He was fired upon, but it did not check him, again he was shot, and yet he came on, and a death-struggle followed."

"And the man, missy?"

"He escaped, but I heard him say that Sam had wrenched his knife from him and driven it into his side."

"Praise de Lord, honey, for dat much marcy."

"But your pa is away, and what is we to do?"

"We can do nothing but await the doctor's return."

"I told Philip to bring others, for I knew Sam could not live."

"No, chile; well, de Lord is marcyful to us all."

And thus the two sat together while the hours went by.

Midnight came and passed, and the small hours were going by, when suddenly a step was heard without.

"It is the doctor."

"Yes, missy."

"Alas! too late."

"Yes, missy."

In answer to the knock, Madge threw the door open.

Instantly she started back.

"*Captain Kyd!*" she cried.

"Yes, I have come for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, come with me to my hut, and lose no time."

"But why?"

"Ask no questions now, but come."

Madge saw that the old man was dripping wet, and she wondered at his coming; but she hastily threw on her storm-suit, and bidding Phillis remain near the corpse, walked out into the night with the old Hermit Sailor.

"How have you been able to come here?" she asked, as he led the way to the shore.

"Man can do much when driven to it."

At the shore was the old hermit's boat, and the sail was up, while it was tugging hard at the little pier.

Into it they got and Madge took the tiller, while the old man crouched near her.

Away darted the boat, and the fierce wind sent it along at terrific speed.

The wind was fairly on the beam, once they had gotten out of the harbor, and Madge laid her course directly for the hermit's cot.

The pace at which the little boat went was a terrific one.

The waves dashed over it, it bounded like a cork upon the waters, but still was held steadily on its way.

At last the point was reached, and the two sprang ashore.

Hastily they went to the hut, the door was thrown open, and there, lying upon the hermit's bed was a man.

Madge started, for it was he who had attempted to kidnap her, and who had killed Silly Sam.

"He lives! thank God we are not too late."

"I live, yes, but death is not far away."

"I am glad to see you, girl, for now that I know death's grip is upon me I wish to ease my conscience of its sin," said the man in a faint voice.

"Waste not your strength, and I will explain," interposed the hermit.

"He came here for gold, and I would give him none."

"He came once before and attempted my life, but did not kill me, and searching my cabin got nothing."

"I knew him then, and saw all."

"You saved my life, my child, and I told him so."

"He was foiled in getting gold, so left with a threat."

"He went to you, intending to bring you here, and threaten to kill you unless I yielded."

"Again was he foiled, and, with his death-wound, he came here to die."

"I am skilled in surgery and I told him he must die, and he became repentant, and sent me for you."

"He has a confession to make."

"One that death alone wrings from me," hoarsely said the dying man.

"Why confess to me?" asked Madge.

"Because you can tell those whom I have wronged."

"I will do all that I can."

"When I am dead this old man will tell you who I am."

"Now, let me say that I follow the sea, and my acts have been lawless."

"You know the Brandons, girl?"

"Yes, I know them, if they are alive."

"Well, I had cause to hate one Noel Brandon, who as an officer did his duty, while I, as a sailor, disobeying orders, deserved my punishment."

"He was not as severe as I would have been with one of my men, as I have been for far lighter offenses than I committed."

"He had me flogged, and I swore revenge."

"I bitterly kept my oath."

"I knew that he was hated by his two superior officers, and I knew that they owed him large gambling debts, and so, after he had killed the one in a duel, and was dismissed, I deserted, dogged his steps, and chance gave me my cue to act."

"His captain went ashore, stopped at the same inn, and I saw my opportunity."

"I knew the captain had drawn a large sum of money, and when he went to his room I waited."

"He did not come out, so I listened and heard him breathing heavily."

"I went to the stage office, where Lieutenant Brandon had left his belt of arms, rolled in his cloak."

"I took them, as by mistake, leaving others."

"I returned to the hotel, opened the door, it was not bolted, entered, and I killed the captain and robbed him, leaving the things there of Lieutenant Brandon to criminate him."

"You know what success I met with."

"My name on board ship was Ned Bronson, but my real name this old man will tell you after I have slipped life's cable."

Madge was too deeply moved by what she had heard to speak for some minutes, and then she said:

"Can you sign your name to this confession, if I write it?"

"Yes."

The hermit gave her writing materials, and she hastily wrote a few lines and read them to the dying man.

"Now may I go after a notary and witnesses?"

"Yes."

She darted out of the door into the storm, and soon returned.

Kennedy, the constable, Captain Buntline, and a notary came with her.

They seemed surprised, but Madge gave them no time, but read the confession she had written.

"Is this true?"

"It is," answered the dying man.

"Ask for his oath while dying, Mister Notary."

The notary obeyed.

"You swear to this as your dying confession?"

"Yes."

"You killed the man whom Noel Brandon was accused of killing?"

"I did."

"And robbed him?"

"Yes."

"Who gave you your death-wound?"

"One who is now dead."

"It was Silly Sam," and Madge told of the midnight visit.

"Why went you there?"

"For gold."

"And why came you here?"

"I was flying, saw shelter, and wounded, I came here to die."

This explanation seemed to satisfy all, and then a silence followed.

"The man will live but a short while, so I will call up the sexton and have him removed for burial," said the constable.

A few moments more and the man died, without uttering another word.

Like a statue the Hermit Sailor stood, and saw the men bear him away.

Then the others started to follow, and Captain Buntline said:

"Miss Madge, you will come to the inn?"

"No, I return home at once."

"It is dawn now, and you will need breakfast."

"I will give her some breakfast; I wish to speak with her," said the Hermit.

So they departed, and Madge was left alone with the Hermit Sailor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE HERMIT'S LEGACY.

"My child, I asked you to remain, that I might speak to you," said the old Hermit Sailor in a low tone, when he had been left alone with Madge.

"I am glad to remain, sir."

"I wish to tell you something of my life, child, and, as I may drop off at any moment, I will speak now."

"I am an old man, and an Englishman."

"I was surgeon in the English navy."

"I loved late in life, never having met my ideal woman until I had reached two-score years."

"She was pledged to another, but loved me."

"We could not break the match her parents had made but in one way—by death."

"I forced the man to meet me in a duel, and I killed him."

"He was the commander of my ship."

"I was sentenced to be hanged, and she I loved saved me, by rescuing me from prison."

"We fled together, and the vessel we set sail on was seized by pirates."

"I fought so well for my bride, that they wished to make me one of them, and I accepted their terms."

"Thus I became a pirate leader."

"My wife went with me the world over, and our child, the man you saw die here a few minutes ago, was born at sea on a pirate craft."

"I amassed riches, and at last gave up the sea; but death took my loved wife from me, and in despair I went back upon the ocean as a rover."

"I hoarded treasure, burying it here, there, everywhere."

"I had left my son in the care of a good tutor; but one day he came into my cabin and made himself known as a powder-monkey who had been two years before the mast on my vessel."

"I was horrified that he should know what I was; but knowing it I allowed him to remain and he was brought up a pirate."

"He sought often to take my life, and become chief, and at last, in very fear of him, my son, I left the sea and came here to live alone, to die alone."

"I had once met your father, and he had saved my life, when I was set upon by a crowd, some of whom recognized me."

"Your father believed my story and saved me."

"He lived then on his plantation on the Carolina coast, and was a rich man."

"Adversity befell him in the loss of his wife, and broken-hearted he let his estate go to ruin, was sold out, and with you and his servants set sail for another land."

"One night the vessel was captured by a pirate craft, and I commanded her."

"I recognized him, and I gave him his freedom, and put him on a vessel bound into the Kennebec."

"He landed on its bank and made his home where it now is."

"Strange to say my steps, flying from my son, led me hither, and we met again."

"There he has lived, and here I dwell, and will die."

"But, my child, I have treasures the world knows not of."

"In a cave back of yonder bunks is a fortune."

"I pledge you it is not a pirate's treasure, but my own inheritance, left me in England by my parents, and converted into precious stones."

"I have kept it in hiding there, and all is yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes; but believe me I would not give you a dollar that was gained by piracy."

"All the hiding-places of my treasure, I have been looking up, and your father, as a

Government officer, has been digging up the booty, and the share that has been given to him and his crew has been twenty per cent.; the balance he has turned over to the Government."

"My father a Government officer?" gasped Madge.

"Yes, did you not know it?"

"No, nor suspect it; is it true?"

"Would I speak falsely to you, child?"

"He enlisted in the Government service at my suggestion, and though bearing the brand of a smuggler, a pirate, even, he has served well his State."

"He formed a league, bound them together by oaths, with death the penalty of betrayal, and has, in his vessels, done a vast deal of good."

"Believed to be a smuggler by smugglers, he has sought their haunts and captured them, and he it is that has cleared this coast mainly of outlaws, he and his band, but only the chief officials have known it, and he has borne the brand of an outlaw to accomplish good."

"A wretch, dwelling in one of the up counties, was receiving smuggled goods."

"He pretended to be an honest man, and was believed to be a legitimate merchant."

"Your father tracked him down, found he was even cheating the smugglers, by running off with their goods, to sell them in Boston, and knew that he was a cruel murderer."

"So he ran him down in his sloop, took him from the packet schooner and hanged him, as he had orders from the admiral to do."

"Was the name of the man Job Jennings?" gasped Madge, suppressing her excited feelings with the greatest effort.

"Yes."

"And my father's vessel?"

"He had two, one the Blue Bell, the other its counterpart, the Kidnapper."

"At last I know all; but you are the confidant of my father?"

"I have helped him all I could, and tried to give to the Government all my hidden booty, and he got me a pardon long ago for my crimes, so I can die content."

"But remember, your legacy from me, a fortune not sullied lies here."

"See! when I am gone I leave this hut, all to you, for I shall have the notary here to-day."

"See!"

He stepped to the bunks, touched a spring, and they swung out like a door.

Behind them was a hole in the solid rock, and in it was an iron chest.

"Here is the key, and this is the spring, so you know how to get your treasure."

"Come to see me again when you can."

"Now, good-by."

Like one in a dream, Madge walked out of the hut.

The dawn had come, and clouds were skurrying along.

But it had ceased raining.

The wind still blew half a gale, and getting into her boat, as one might who walked in sleep, she mechanically took the tiller, hauled in the sheet, and the skiff darted away for Vernon's Haven.

CHAPTER XL.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

TRUE to his word, Captain West ran in shore for Madge, and she was soon on board, accompanied by Melmer.

Her father had not returned, but Philip had a letter for him which Madge had left.

Poor Sam had been buried up in the pines, and the place was wearing a desolate look for Madge.

No word of the Brandons had been heard, but the depredations of the Coast Corsair had been numerous.

"Glad to see you, Miss Madge," said Captain West.

Madge bowed, and said:

"Captain, crowd on all sail, the wind is fresh and fair for you, and you can soon reach Boston."

"I will make her fly, Miss Madge."

And he did so, as far as a vessel can fly over the waters.

Madge and Melmer watched her sailing critically, jotted down certain improvements, and Madge decided she could not get as good a craft, so said:

"Captain West, what will you take for your vessel?"

"I don't care to sell."

"Speak quick, for we are going up the harbor."

"I really would not like to part with her, Miss Madge."

"What did she cost you?"

"Eight thousand dollars, miss."

"I'll give you ten."

The captain shook his head.

"I'll do more. I'll give you ten thousand, and what is more, when I have finished with her, I'll give her to you as a present."

"If she is sunk or harmed, I will give you five thousand more."

"It's a bargain, Miss Madge."

"When do you want her?"

"Just as soon as you can throw the cargo out of her."

"You can take your old schooner back on the return trip."

"Done!" said the pleased old skipper.

Arriving at the dock, Melmer disappeared hastily ashore, and Madge told the freight-shifters they should have double wages to unload the schooner in such a time.

Then she went to the parties her father had given her letters to.

She was well received, her requests promptly attended to, and that very night the Kennebec Queen began to get her guns aboard.

Carpenters were busy cutting ports in her bulwarks, a pivot-gun was being mounted forward, sailmakers were at work on her canvas, the bowsprit gave place to one much longer, as did the mainboom and gaff, and the topmasts were supplanted by others some ten feet higher.

The heavy figurehead on her bows, which retarded her progress under full sail, was taken off, and her cut-water was left as clean as a razor.

In thirty-six hours the Kennebec Queen was ready for sea, and Melmer had a crew of fine men on board, some of them appearing to have come from the Government navy-yard.

Then out to sea the Queen was pointed, and Madge Vernon felt that her cruise of revenge had nearly ended.

Straight to the Kennebec she ran; but her father had not been there, though the pirate schooner had been seen that afternoon coming down the coast.

In chase went the Queen, but after a few leagues' run she luffed up, a boat was lowered, and Madge was pulled ashore to a small island.

It was the same where poor Sam had been left that night with his bundle, while Madge went on to discover the Secret League's retreat.

Landing, she hastened into the island, but had not gone far before she met one who came quickly toward her.

"Madge, I have anxiously looked for you to come and free me, for I am well now, and fully able to begin the work of clearing my name of its stain."

"That is done, Mr. Brandon, for the murderer has confessed, and the village notary has his confession."

"Heaven, I thank Thee," and Noel Brandon lowered his head.

"Madge, when you sent me ashore that night, with Tom, I felt that you intended to do something desperate."

"Sam told me when here, how you had wrecked the Blue Bell, to let all believe I had been lost along with Tom, and I owe to you my life."

"My wound has healed, and I am a free man, thanks to you."

"Come, there is work for you to do, for an armed schooner awaits your command."

"Call Tom, and we will go on board at once, for your family are in the power of Darke Darrell, who has turned pirate."

"Come, I will tell you all when we reach the schooner."

Noel Brandon was deeply moved by what he heard, and he said quickly:

"Gladly will I go," and a ringing shout brought Tap-room Tom to their side.

"Get our traps from the cave, Tom, for we leave at once."

Tom was no longer the despicable drunkard, for he had gotten back the semblance of his former manhood.

He kissed the hand of Madge in a reveren-

tial way, and bounded away to obey the order given him.

Soon the three stood on the schooner's deck and her sails were spread in search of the pirate schooner.

CHAPTER XLII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

"HARK!"

It was Madge who spoke, and she stood on the deck of the Queen.

In the still night air the sounds of firing and shouts of combatants came to their ears.

"It is the pirate," cried Madge.

"And those are the cheers of the kidnappers, miss, for I know their yell."

"Your father has crossed the pirate's track," said Melmer.

In among the islands the schooner was headed, Madge at the wheel, while Noel Vernon went forward, and called the crew silently to quarters.

Melmer acted as a second officer, and soon all was in readiness for the combat.

Among the islands they cruised, led by the sound of fighting, and soon the Kennebec Queen swept out into an open bay.

There, in the star-light was visible, a large schooner, and alongside of her a sloop.

A desperate fight was going on, but the voices of the pirates were triumphant, for far superior in numbers they were driving their assailants into the sea, for with his band a score and a half of men, Captain Vernon had daringly run aboard the outlaw craft in his little sloop the kidnapper.

As the Queen drew near, the pirates' shouts became filled with triumph; but their cries changed suddenly, as Madcap Madge laid the schooner skillfully alongside, and Noel Brandon led two-score men over upon the outlaw deck.

The approach of the Kennebec Queen had not been seen by either the pirates or the band of Captain Vernon.

With a sweep that was irresistible, the Queen's crew drove their foes aft, and Noel Vernon, cutlass in hand, forced Darke Darrell upon his own deck.

Each recognized the other, by the flashing of the firearms, and the pirate fell back a step in surprise.

Instantly his weapon was struck from his hand and Noel Brandon said sternly.

"I spare your life now—to hang you!"

Instantly he was seized by Melmer and Captain Vernon, and the defeated pirate crew threw themselves into the sea, excepting those who were taken prisoners.

Then cheers of triumph arose on the air, while, dragging Darke Darrell into his cabin, Noel Brandon hissed forth:

"Where are my parents and my sister?"

"I know nothing of them."

"Liar! you shall swing for this."

"Hol on deck, rig a rope to hang this wretch."

"Now will you speak?"

"If you spare my life I will tell you."

"I will make no terms, sir."

"Then I refuse to tell."

"Sail ho!"

All started as the cry came from on deck.

Then followed:

"It is the Scorpion!"

Again cheers were heard, and soon after Mayo Maynard came into the pirate's cabin.

"Ha! you are run down, you sea-devil; but I'll be in at your hanging—ho, Brandon! Great God!"

"I am Noel Brandon, Maynard, and can offer my hand, for the stain upon my name has been cleared off by this noble girl."

"Thank God! and I take your hand gladly."

"But, Brandon, I have on board my vessel your parents and your sister."

"I gave chase to this fellow, but lost him among the islands, and Captain Vernon met me in his sloop, and directed me to the pirate's retreat."

"There I found your parents and sister safe, but in dire distress, for this devil had given Miss Brandon thirty days to decide whether she would become his wife or not."

"Your mother is ill, but this good news will cheer her."

"I captured the retreat and the booty, and have some prisoners, and you have finished up the good work."

"Now let us decide as to that wretch."

"I shall hang him at once," sternly said Noel Brandon.

"Do so!" was the quiet reply.

"He is your prisoner."

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONCLUSION.

OVER the tragic scene of the pirate's death a veil is drawn.

Defiantly he met his end, along with Talbot and his other officers, while his crew were sent to the hold in irons.

The meeting between the son, supposed to be dead, and his parents was deeply affecting, and in broken accents they begged his forgiveness.

The meeting between brother and sister no one who witnessed it ever forgot.

Madge, too, came in for a warm welcome, and then, too, Skipper Vernon's story was told, how he was not a smuggler, but an officer of the law.

And back to port sailed the vessels, the Scorpion, the Kennebec Queen, the Corsair, and the Kidnapper.

Into port they sailed, and such a scene as greeted them was never witnessed before.

True to her word, Madge gave the Kennebec Queen back to Captain West, who at once changed her name to Madcap Madge, the Siren of the Sea.

The Government heard the story of Noel Brandon, and reinstated him again; but he quickly resigned, and Madge Vernon became his wife, and a rich wife she was, for the old Hermit Sailor had left her his fortune, as he had promised.

Joyce Brandon was married to Mayo Maynard at the same time that Madge became Mrs. Noel Brandon, and thus the curtain goes down upon the actors in my Drama of a Hundred years Ago.

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